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MARY PRICE;

OR, THE

MEMOIRS OF A SERVANT-MAID.

BY G. W. M. REYNOLDS,

AUTHOR OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SERIES OF "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON," "THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON," "THE SEAMSWOMAN," "THE BRONZE STATUE," "FAUST," "THE NECROMANCER," "THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE," "POPE JOAN," "THE PIXY," "ROBERT MACAIRE," "JOSEPH WILMOT," "THE DAYS OF HOGARTH," "KENNETH," "WAGNER, THE WEHR-WOLF," "THE SOLDIER'S WIFE," "THE RYE HOUSE PLOT," &c., &c.

BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED

BY F. GILBERT.

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*** We have to apologize for two glaring inaccuracies committed by the artist: one occurs in the illustration to No. 57, where the foreigner is represented as wearing *moustaches*; and the other in No. 96, where Sir Aubrey Clavering is depicted with both his arms, although the text describes him as having lost one in a duel.

MARY PRICE;
OR,
THE MEMOIRS OF A SERVANT-MAID.



CHAPTER LXXXVI.

KINGSTON GRANGE.

On the following morning—a bright cheerful crisp day, although it was now the month of November—I proceeded alone to Kingston Grange, a country

No. 53

seat situated about three miles from Deal. The walk was a very pleasant one through the fields, where the pathways were hard with the frost. On approaching the Grange, I found that it consisted of a pile of red brick buildings, very spacious and very irregular, but delightfully situated on a slight eminence in the midst of grounds laid out in a

picturesque manner. On entering the enclosure by the park-gates, where there was a porter's lodge, I saw several grooms exercising a number of horses; while a gentleman and lady, also on horseback, and some children on ponies, were cantering about the park. I advanced towards the mansion; and on reaching the great folding-doors, which stood wide open, found myself on the threshold of a very large hall of oak, with a groined ceiling elaborately sculptured. Three or four footmen, in morning costume, were lounging about and talking of horses; while an old porter, in a flaming livery, and with a powdered wig, was reclining indolently in his huge leathern chair of sentry-box shape, reading a sporting weekly newspaper. On beholding me he asked my business; and when I mentioned it, he said, glancing through the doorway towards the gentleman and lady who were riding in the park, "The Squire and missus will be in to lunch in about half-an-hour. Perhaps you will sit down till they come in."

He spoke civilly, even kindly; but I could not help noticing that the footmen stared at me with an intentness almost amounting to rudeness. The instant however the old porter made a sign, which he did, for them to desist, they averted their looks; so that I at once felt assured he was no mean authority in the household. I sat down in the hall, where I had not been many minutes ere three little ponies with the children riding on them, and attended by a groom on horseback, galloped up to the door. These children were all girls, their ages appearing to be eight, ten, and twelve; and so far as I could judge, they sat upon their little steeds with the most perfect knowledge of horsemanship. They had elegant riding-habits, hats with feathers, blue veils, and little whips not larger than switches. The footmen ran out from the hall to help them to alight; and then those three children caressed their ponies with quite a womanly air.

"Now, John," said the eldest, addressing the footman who had helped her off, "walk Juno about a little before she's taken into the stable. And mind, I won't have her legs washed till she is thoroughly cool. You see we have been giving the horses a regular good run."

"And I will have my Neptune walked about too," said the second young lady. "In five minutes you may let my horse have a pail of water—but not before. I shall come round to the stable myself presently, and see him fed."

"And so shall I," chimed in the third little girl, who, be it remembered, was only eight years old. "I think Dick,"—alluding, as I afterwards found, to one of the hostlers,—"*cheats* my Hercules out of his corn: but I shall see to that in future."

Then these three little Amazons, holding up the skirts of their riding-habits with the perfect air of women, and slashing with their whips, ascended the steps and entered the hall, the old porter rising out of respect. They all looked very hard at me, with a good-humoured expression of curiosity; and the eldest, speaking to the porter, said, "Who is this young person?"

"She has come after the place, Miss Harriet," was the old man's reply.

"Oh, very well!" exclaimed the young lady. "I dare say she will suit; she's very respectable-looking. Sit down, my dear," she said to me, with

as condescending an air as if she had been a grown woman of thirty; and I could barely suppress a smile at the idea of this child of twelve giving herself such an air: but I saw at once that there was nothing really arrogant nor impudent in it—but merely the natural result of being brought up in a way that was calculated to make these little creatures fancy that they were already women. They passed on towards the staircase, which they ascended with no giggling, nor laughing, nor romping, as might be expected from children of their age, but with the sedate air of grown-up persons.

"Three nice young ladies, ain't they?" said the hall porter, turning towards me; "quite little women in their way. Lord bless you! they know as much about the stables and the horses as their father or their mother. Miss Harriet, the eldest, is quite the young woman already. She has finished her education——"

"Indeed?" I said. "But she does not appear to me to be more than twelve years old."

"No more she is: but master and missus consider that it is quite enough schooling from five to twelve. There's no embroidery, and drawing, and dancing, and nonsense of that sort here: it's all out-door exercise and amusement—or else billiards and bagatelle in-doors. Why, Miss Harriet can play billiards as well as the Squire; and he's a pretty good hand. Miss Jessie—that's the second young lady—she has only just turned ten—but she knows as much about horseflesh as her sister; and little Miss Maria—that's the youngest of the three you saw—begins to know all about it too."

"Then it is not for either of those young ladies that a nursemaid is required?" said I, innocently enough.

The old porter stared at me with unfeigned astonishment: he seemed as if he could scarcely believe his ears—and it was some time before he could recover the faculty of speech in order to give expression to his feelings.

"What? young missuses want a nursemaid!" he exclaimed. "Come, that's rather too strong. No, no—even Miss Maria has long passed that: she's rid her pony for the last three year ever since she was five—and *that*, you know, makes a woman of a young gal. There's Miss Catherine—she's four, and the youngest of all—and it's her that you'll have to take care of, if so be you get the place—which I have no doubt you will. I suppose you can ride on horseback?"

It was now my turn to look astonished, which I certainly did—perhaps even more so than the old porter had just now: for I naturally supposed that in this equestrian family the qualification of skilful horsemanship would be found indispensable.

"Well, I don't know that it's necessary," resumed the hall-porter: "but I do know that it would be preferred. However, missus will tell you all about it presently. By the bye, them footmen of our's stared at you a bit just now: but you mustn't think anything of it. I can guess why it was. Mr. Sands was up here on Saturday, and recommended you to missus; and missus told her maid that the famous Mary Price would very likely come and take the situation; and so the maid soon spread it all over the house. For I must tell you that we always read the newspapers here—specially the sporting ones—and we read all about that

affair of your's at the time down at Derby. You see, servants take an interest in things that happen to one of their own order; and that's the reason we recollected your name so well. Perhaps you took notice of the tallest of them footmen—a good-looking fellow—”

“I scarcely noticed them at all, I can assure you,” was my answer.

“Well, so much the better: you are different from other gals. But as I was going to say, that fellow John—he's the head footman, and a precious knowing chap he is. Whenever there's any lies to tell to visitors, I always put him forward to do the business. You have no idea how clever he is. Of course you know what I mean: it's when the Squire and missus deny themselves to any visitors they don't like.”

I had not been so long a time in service without knowing very well what this species of “white lying” meant. And here I may parenthetically remark that it is one of the most demoralizing influences of the many which, emanating from the master or mistress, tend to spoil and corrupt domestic servants. By being constantly habituated to tell falsehoods to visitors, they are too apt to extend the sphere of their mendaciousness and make the practice subservient to their own purposes. Especially is this the case in fashionable houses and the mansions of the rich, where the servants too frequently have the most wondrous facility for the utterance of falsehoods, throwing them off as glibly from their tongues as a water-wheel scatters the spray.

My conversation with the hall-porter was cut short by the appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, who galloping up to the front door, dismounted, and entered the hall. Mr. Kingston—or Squire Kingston, as he was called—appeared to be a gentleman of about forty. He was of middle stature, strongly built, but not stout—yet looking somewhat stouter than he really was, because his clothes were all loosely made. He wore a blue neckerchief with white spots—a buff waistcoat made very long in a groom-like style, and having gilt buttons—a green cut-away coat, also with gilt buttons, and large side-pockets—white corduroy breeches, that seemed to hang very loose indeed, all in wrinkles, or rather folds, one above another, as if they were not half braced up—and top-boots, the black leather parts of which exhibited countless wrinkles also. He had spurs on his heels, and carried a horsewhip, which he cracked above his head as he entered the hall. His white beaver hat was of a bell shape, had very large brims, and looked as if it had never been brushed. When he took it off, he displayed a head entirely bald on the crown, though his hair and whiskers were quite dark and unstreaked with silver. Doubtless it was through the habit of almost constantly wearing his hat, that the premature loss of the hair on the crown of his head was occasioned. He was a good-looking, good-humoured gentleman, with laughing blue eyes, and an invariable smile upon his lips. He was evidently very full of animal spirits—talked somewhat loud, but in a merry, joyous tone—and altogether seemed as little acquainted with the cares of this life as it was possible for a human creature to be.

Mrs. Kingston was a fine tall woman, about five-and-thirty years of age. She was formed upon a

large scale, but by no means inclined to stoutness; the symmetry of her figure was perfect, and the riding-habit set it off to the utmost advantage. She had handsome blue eyes and dark brown hair—an aquiline countenance—bright scarlet lips—and a very rich bloom upon the cheeks. She also appeared to be of happy disposition and cheerful spirits; so that it would be difficult to find a couple more properly matched. They appeared to be very fond of each other, but did not show it by any uxoriousness on his part or studied endearments on her's: there was a joyous and rollicking good-humour and familiarity in the way in which they spoke to each other, which, though it would have shocked the fastidious creatures of fashion at the West End of London, was nevertheless far more agreeable in its blunt frankness and honest open-heartedness, than the sickly sentimentalisms which between husband and wife too often disguise domestic unhappiness.

“I am sure that chesnut mare of your's stumbles, Tom,” said Mrs. Kingston to her husband as they entered the hall. “I watched it particularly.”

“Not a bit of it, old girl,” replied her husband: “the turf was slippery just there. I would back that mare to trot down a hill twelve mile an hour and not trip at a stone. That new brown horse of your's goes splendid—”

“Yes—I like him very much,” answered Mrs. Kingston. “I think he is an honest horse.”

“I'm sure he is,” rejoined the Squire; “and a clever horse too. You hav'n't found out yet what a clever horse that is. Did I tell you where he was bred? Down at Farmer Bugsby's at Ash. It's only rising four year old now.”

“I know that, old boy,” replied his wife. “Trust me! I looked in his mouth within the hour he was fetched to the Grange—”

“Oh, you did, did you?” exclaimed the Squire. “Then what's become of the proverb about looking a gift-horse in the mouth? Why, you rogue you, I gave eighty guineas for that horse, thinking it would please you.”

“And now, old boy,” exclaimed Mrs. Kingston, displaying a set of brilliant teeth as she laughed heartily, “what becomes of the adage which says that you never ought to tell how much it costs you to make a present?”

The Squire and his wife had turned and stopped on the threshold of the hall to look at the horses from which they had just dismounted, and which were the objects of their discourse. The old porter now took advantage of a pause in that conversation to accost them.

“Well, Hutton, what is it?” asked Mrs. Kingston, with that sort of familiarity which a kind-hearted mistress might show towards an old and faithful servant.

“Please, ma'am, here's the young person which Mr. Sands spoke about—”

“Oh, indeed!” said Mrs. Kingston, instantaneously turning round towards me; and I heard her immediately after remark aside to her husband, “A very respectable-looking girl, is she not?”

“Yes—a likely filly,” was the response given by the Squire, and which also caught my ear, though intended only for that of his wife. “She's clean made—stands well on her legs—and looks honest.”

“Will you come with me?” said Mrs. Kingston:

and she led the way into a room opening from the hall. It was an immense apartment, with two large bow-windows, and a huge old fashioned chimney-piece, the mantel standing at least five feet from the floor and supported by elaborate oak-carvings. The room was furnished in an antique style, with high-backed chairs and cushions of Utrecht velvet; so that it had partially a baronial air and partially an aspect of the Louis XIV style. Mrs. Kingston sat down; and when she saw that I remained standing, she bade me take a seat also,—adding that “she dared say I was tired after my walk.” She then proceeded to observe that Mr. Sands had strongly recommended me for the vacant situation of nursemaid in her family, and that my appearance seemed fully to justify all that had been said of me. I expressed my gratitude for the kind opinion thus formed—enumerated the principal places where I had been—and declared my readiness to do all I could to give satisfaction. I begged to add that if Mrs. Kingston would take the trouble to write to Mrs. Antrobus at Winchester, she could learn more of me.

“Oh! that is not at all necessary,” was the lady’s response, delivered with off-hand sincerity. “I am quite prepared to engage with you at once. It is a little girl of four years old whom you will have to take care of; and as there is but one child requiring your attention, no under-nursemaid is kept. But you will not be compelled to do any menial work up in the nursery: one of the housemaids will do all that. You will have nothing to do but to devote yourself to little Catherine. I like her to be as much out of doors as possible—from morning till night—there’s nothing like exercise for children as well as for grown-up people. She has got her little pony, but only walks with it as yet; so you can walk by the side and take care of her. Do you ride on horseback yourself?”

I answered in the negative.

“That’s a pity. Several of the maids can ride, beautifully. We keep skirts for them on purpose: they tie them on—and in that way, without any fuss or nonsense, go out sometimes of an evening and have a gallop round the park. The Squire and I like to see it: it makes them so healthy—puts them into good spirits—renders them cheerful—and they do their work and like their place all the better. I dare say you will have courage enough to make the attempt before you have been here long.”

Mrs. Kingston then proceeded to name the wages she had been in the habit of giving, and which were very liberal. In short, we soon came to an agreement; and it was understood that I should enter upon the duties of the new place on the morrow.

“If you will leave me your address,” said Mrs. Kingston, “one of the grooms shall drive over in the chaise-cart and fetch you to-morrow afternoon. Oh! it’s no trouble,” she added, as I said a few words expressive of my fear that it would be so. “We have plenty of horses and vehicles of all kinds here; and therefore it’s not even doing you a favour. Now you will go into the servants’ hall and have some refreshment. Or stay!—perhaps you will not like to go amongst the domestics all at once? come with me to the housekeeper’s room.”

Thus speaking, Mrs. Kingston rose from her seat, and raising the skirt of her riding habit, switched

some dust off with her elegant whip, and led the way from the room. As we were crossing the hall, a groom accosted her, and touching his hat, said, “I’m sorry to say, ma’am, that Pluto’s heel is cracked again.”

“Ah! I always thought that was only a patched-up affair,” she responded. “Pluto is too fine an animal to get rid of; and so we will have the hoof fired. I will come and see it done myself presently. Where’s your master?”

“He’s gone into the yard, ma’am, to see the brown colt’s tail notched,” answered the hostler.

“Oh! very well. You must mind how the tail is tied up afterwards: but of course the Squire will see to that. Come, Mary?”—and having thus spoken with all the scientific knowledge of a veterinary practitioner, Mrs. Kingston led the way up a superb oaken staircase—then along a passage, into a spacious and comfortable room at the extremity of one of the wings of the building. There sat an elderly, stout, good-tempered-looking female, occupied in measuring out a quantity of very coarse carpet-stuff—which immediately struck me to be a somewhat curious occupation for a housekeeper, whom I should rather have expected to find busied in attending to her preserves, or sorting linen, or keeping accounts.

“I don’t think, ma’am, these new horse-cloths will prove such good wear as the last,” observed the housekeeper, the moment her mistress made her appearance.

“I am sorry to hear you say that, Mrs. Taylor,” answered Mrs. Kingston: “for I selected it myself.”

“I don’t think either, ma’am, you’ll find it an economy to have these things made up at home,” continued the housekeeper. “Not that there’s any trouble in it—but it’s whether the work will be so good—”

“At all events we will give it this trial. But here is the new nursemaid—a very nice young person indeed; and as she has walked all the way from Deal you must make her comfortable. I shall now leave you, Mary, with Mrs. Taylor; and to-morrow you will come here for good.”

Mrs. Kingston then left the room; and the housekeeper, shaking me by the hand, welcomed me most kindly to the Grange, saying that she hoped I should be comfortable. She bade me sit down, and then rang the bell. A housemaid answered the summons: Mrs. Taylor told her to bring up refreshments; and in a few minutes the female re-appeared, bearing a tray laden with provisions. If there were a party of twelve to lunch, there could not have been a more ample supply of provender; and if the food thus brought up, were to be taken as a sample of that furnished for the servants’ hall, the domestics at the Grange assuredly had nothing to complain against. All the time I was eating, Mrs. Taylor chattered away with as much garrulity as the hall-porter had shown: but her entire conversation was about horses. She described to me the whole stud; so that I never heard so much about roans, and bays, and browns, and grays, and whites, and chesnuts, and mahogany-chesnuts, and flea-bitten nags, and two-year olds, and cobs, and fillies, and colts, in all my life before. I now saw plainly enough that the one great topic of interest for this extensive household was *horsecflesh*, from the

youngest to the oldest. Mrs. Taylor justified her looks, which have been already described as very good-natured: she was a kind motherly woman, and pressed me to eat in such a way that if I had followed her entreaties I should have been ill for a week. She seemed quite astonished because I preferred water to the fine home-brewed ale of which at least a quart had been brought up for my special use; and when the luncheon was over and I positively declined to taste the cherry-brandy which she produced from a cupboard, she was still more amazed. She told me that very little tea was drunk in the house, her master and all the men-servants preferring ale, even for breakfast; and that sometimes Mrs. Kingston herself would take a glass of the same in preference to "slops." When I rose to depart, she again shook me cordially by the hand, observing that she had no doubt I should like my place very much; for that the Squire and Mrs. Kingston were the best-tempered people in the world. On descending into the hall, I was told by the porter that Luke (one of the grooms) had put "the old roan" into the chaise-cart and was to drive me back into Deal; and when I expressed my gratitude for so much kind consideration, he looked rather astonished that what he doubtless considered so simple an act should elicit any thanks at all. Indeed, I already perceived that where so many horses were kept there was a general idea of saving the legs as much as possible.

It was a chaise-cart with springs into which I now ascended; and Luke the groom was an elderly hard-featured man, who bore the appearance of being almost incessantly out of doors, the traces of winter's storm and summer's heat all blending in his pippin-coloured cheeks. We rattled along at a good pace; and from the front-door of the Grange down to the gate of Mrs. Scudder's cottage, Luke never ceased entertaining me with the merits, qualities, and exploits of the old roan horse.

"There," he said, hitting it a crack with his whip at starting, "you never see in your life such a chap to go as this be. I've knowed him for fifteen year come Christmas, and have rid and driv him a thousand times, but never knowed him to make a stumble, till one day—that's about five month's ago—no, it must be six though, 'cos I recollect it was just at the time old Joshua, our head-groom as was, broke his neck when riding that bay mare of our'n. Well, as I was saying, it was just at that time that this old roan one day come plump down on his knees when I was on his back, and sent me bang over his head; for I was sitting lazy, not thinking of nothink at the time, much less dreaming of mischief. Well, ever since he has gone better still. There! it was down in Frogson's Walk, just at the bottom of the medder yonder, that this happened. But you never see such a feller for going! Just look how he tramps along: there's steps for yer—there's action! Look what forms he puts hisself into! Why, this hoss will wear many a year longer. He hasn't got no vice about him: never knowed him to shy at nothink—looks straight for'ard—never takes notice of nothink. One day as I was passing Mears's cottage down yonder, the old o'man was shaking out a shirt afore his eyes. Well, thought I, he will shy now if ever he does. But not a bit on't. He went straight on, only just knocking the old o'man down, 'cos why sho's

rayther deaf and didn't hear the boss and cart a-coming. Ah! he's a clever hoss, he is: he does his work tidy. One day—I should think it must be a matter of three year ago—I know it was, 'cos why it was the time that the poor beggarwoman was found starved to death at the front door of the parson's house over yonder—I was driving the old roan here in this very identical cart through Sandwich Turnpike, which I'd got a clear ticket for; and I bawled out the number in the reg'lar way; but the pike-keeper was rayther tipsy and didn't understand: so I suppose he thought I wanted to shirk the toll. Now this here hoss knowed as well as possible that there warn't no toll to pay there; so he cuts on, knocks down the pike-man, and passes bang over him cart and all——"

"Killed him?" I exclaimed, with a shudder.

"Not a bit on't," returned Luke. "That was the cleverness of the old roan: he didn't so much as kick him, and took the wheels as clean away from the feller as if it was done by human beings. Ah! he's a clever hoss, this here. A thief once got into the stable and hid hisself under this chap's manger: but I'm blowed if the old roan didn't fasten his teeth in him and hold him as tight as winky till me and the other grooms, hearing the rascal roar out, came to see what was the matter. Master wouldn't prosecute, because the roan had bit half a pound of flesh out of him; and the Squire thought *that* was punishment enow. You never knowed such a clever hoss as this be—never!"

Such is a sample of the conversation with which I was entertained during a ride of three miles; and I verily believe that if it had extended to thirty, the praises of the old roan would not have been exhausted, nor yet the anecdotes of its exploits. Some of the latter however certainly appeared to me to be of a somewhat malicious character—especially those of the old woman and the turnpike-man: but nevertheless, Luke would persist in declaring that the roan had no vice whatever, and I was bound to believe so accomplished a judge of horseflesh.

On arriving at the little cottage, I found the poor widow weeping bitterly; and as she could not so far compose her feelings as to tell me what had happened, Jane, who had run out to open the door on seeing me arrive in the cart, gave me to understand that it was in consequence of a letter which had come concerning Mrs. Scudder's son. Thereupon the widow took the letter from her pocket, and handed it to me. It was written by a shipmate of her son, and was dated from the man-of-war at Portsmouth on board of which he served. It appeared that Tom Scudder had struck a non-commissioned officer—had been tried by a court-martial, and condemned to receive a hundred lashes, which frightful punishment he had undergone. He was terribly mangled by the fierce lacerations of the diabolic cat-o'-nine-tails, and could not write himself. It also appeared that his pay was stopped till he was pronounced off the sick list, and therefore he had nothing to remit to his poor mother. The shipmate however enclosed a sovereign of his own money, and bade the old lady not to be uneasy about the recovery of her son as he was in no danger. A postscript to this letter, which was so interlarded with sea-terms as to be scarcely intelligible to me, declared that it was only after great provocation that Tom Scudder had struck the non-commissioned

officer, who was a terrible tyrant, and that the poor fellow had the heartiest sympathy of the whole ship's crew.

I did my best to console the worthy widow; and having a few pounds left, insisted upon her taking a portion as a loan until the receipt of the next remittance from her son. I then narrated all I had seen and heard at Kingston Grange; and the poor woman expressed her satisfaction that I had every prospect of being so happy. As for Jane, she was delighted; and her gaiety was only damped by the prospect of separation. We walked as far as Mr. Sands' house to thank him for his kindness in procuring me such an excellent situation: but he came rushing out to the door with his watch in his hand, declaring that as he had given me half-an-hour and a minute over, on Saturday morning, he could not afford me a single second now, as he had to be two miles off at a particular time, and only five minutes to do it in. William was rejoiced to find that fortune had so completely turned in our favour, and that my prospects of being comfortable were so great.

On the following morning the post brought me several letters. One was from Eustace, replete as usual with the most affectionate expressions and the tenderest assurances, and imploring me not to postpone much longer the happy day which was to unite us. The second letter which I opened was from poor Mrs. Messiter, thanking me in enthusiastic terms for what I had done for her, and invoking all possible blessings upon my head. A third was signed Selina Temple. It contained but a few lines, written on the previous Saturday, and announcing that the wedding was to take place on the Monday. It also contained a beautiful ring, with an inscription inside the hoop, to the effect that it was a gift from my "sincere friends, Arthur and Selina." A fourth letter was from Sarah, stating that she was still comfortable and happy at Talbot Abbey. I answered these letters, sending the one to Selina enclosed in another to Mrs. Antrobus. By the time my correspondence was completed, I had to take Jane to Mr. Sands' house, which was now to become her home; and having bade her and William farewell, I returned to the cottage. My preparations for departure were soon made: the chaise-cart came at the promised hour, driven by Luke, and drawn by the old roan. I took leave of Mrs. Scudder, thanking her sincerely for all kindnesses received at her hands, and promising to come and see her soon. She embraced me with tears in her eyes, and asked my permission to have Jane occasionally to tea with her. I of course readily gave my consent—mounted the cart—and was soon out of sight of the neat little cottage where I had known so much bitter anguish all compressed into so short a period, and so suddenly relieved by a change of circumstances. During the three miles' ride to Kingston Grange, Luke expatiated, as on the previous day, upon the good qualities of the old roan; so that by the time we reached our destination, if I were not duly impressed with the fact that it was the most sagacious, tractable, and even amiable horse in the whole world, it was not his fault.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

MY EIGHTH PLACE.

FROM what has already been said, it is no doubt understood that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston were very wealthy people—that they lived in splendid style—that their establishment was on a vast scale—and that they had a numerous stud of horses. The style of their living was however of a true old English character. The breakfast-table displayed cold rounds of beef, hot rump-steaks, and flagons of ale, as well as the more effeminate delicacies which they regarded as the innovations of modern times. In the middle of the day there was always an ample luncheon served up: the dinner was composed of joints and pies, and other substantial, with but very few made-dishes, and these were only introduced when there was company: for Squire Kingston had a sovereign contempt for what he called "kick-shaws," and invariably sitting down as hungry as a hunter, preferred doing justice to roast-beef and plum-pudding. The servants'-hall was equally well furnished with the solid necessities of life: but I and my little charge, Catherine, took our meals with Mrs. Taylor the housekeeper. I had however a fine large room for my own quarters, and which bore the appellation of the nursery. The three "young ladies"—as Harriet, Jessy, and Maria were invariably called, so that a stranger hearing them thus spoken of, would take them to be three grown-up sisters—had all their meals with their parents; and I had nothing to do with either of them, not even with Maria. They occupied the same bed-chamber, and had their own maids to attend upon them.

The occupations and amusements of the family were chiefly out-of-doors, and consisted for the most part in riding. I never saw such an inveterate horse-woman as Mrs. Kingston. She rose the moment it was light at that winter season of the year, and took a six-mile ride with her husband before their somewhat late breakfast. After this meal she was in the saddle again, always down to lunch-time—very often till dinner; and in the evening she would play billiards or bagatelle with her husband or her daughters. Cards were not allowed in the house; and when there were visitors, there was no playing for money in the billiard-room. Though so passionately fond of manly sports and everything that related to horses, Mr. Kingston was no gamester on the race-course: in fact he had no race-horses at all—and his chief delight appeared to be riding about with his wife. I never saw a couple more attached to each other than this; and it was an attachment without nonsense or hypocrisy; it showed itself in a truly honest and genuine manner, with frankness and open-heartedness. There were no studied demonstrations of this mutual love; but all the proofs were thrown off as it were from the heart like sparks from the anvil. I must add that if Mr. and Mrs. Kingston lived a happy life, or enjoyed themselves thoroughly upon their great wealth and in their own fashion, they were very far from being selfish in their pleasures. It has been before said that they allowed and encouraged all their servants, female as well as male, to ride the horses; and sometimes of an evening they would assemble the

tenants of their estate in the park in summer time, or in the house in the cold season—have a dance, and wind up the festivities with a good substantial supper in the baronial dining-room (the one where I had my first interview with Mrs. Kingston). The charities of these excellent people were extensive, and as unostentatiously bestowed as they were great. They were consequently beloved by all around, and made their riches a source of benefit to many families.

From what has been said, the reader will have understood that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston were thoroughly good, and indeed excellent people. They were hospitable: but they chose to select their friends, and would not submit to have disagreeable acquaintances forced upon them. In that neighbourhood—particularly in the village of Wahner, which is near Deal—there were a great number of persons given to gossiping, scandal-mongering, dinner-hunting, and all those mean pursuits which too frequently prevail in small country-places. All such persons as these were the objects of Mr. and Mrs. Kingston's utmost aversion; and whenever any of them called at the Grange, the Kingstons either showed by their manner that they were not welcome, or else had themselves denied altogether. It was the facility of invention which John, the head footman, showed when giving these denials that Dutton the hall-porter had so specially eulogized to me. Doubtless the Kingstons were not aware that by directing their servants to tell stories for them, these domestics would in time learn to tell stories on their own account and in other ways. The generality of the servants at the Grange were a true and honest set of persons, because good masters and mistresses make good servants: but John, the head footman, was certainly an exception to this rule, and could tell a falsehood with the most unblushing effrontery. He hated trouble; and when he neglected to do things which he was ordered to perform, he got out of the scrape by means of his readiness of invention in devising excuses, and the effrontery with which he uttered them.

"John," said Mr. Kingston, coming into the hall one morning after breakfast, "there's that new riding-coat of mine which got all the white paint on it two or three days ago: I told you to get some turpentine and take it out."

"I used a whole bottle of turpentine, sir, this very morning: but the paint won't move."

"The deuce you did! How is it still hanging up in my cupboard, then?"

"I took it back there, sir."

"But it was there when I came down stairs: for I saw it."

"It was after you came down, sir, that I did it."

"It's there now, and quite dry."

"I took it back again, sir, while you was at breakfast."

"But about its being dry?"

"Turpentine, sir, when it's good, dries directly," answered John, looking steadily in his master's face.

"But it does not smell of turpentine in the least," remarked Mr. Kingston, getting a little bewildered.

"Because I did it in the room, sir, with a pail of water standing in the middle, which absorbed all the smell. That's the way the painters do, sir."

"I know they do: but they put hay into it."

"So did I, sir—two good wisps."

"Well, this is rather curious," said Mr. Kingston. "But how is it you did not take Ponto to the pond just now? I told you to be sure and do it."

"I did, sir," answered John. "Half-an-hour ago."

"Well, but the dog's quite dry, and has been in the breakfast parlour——"

"It's very odd, sir: he was in the water ten minutes."

"But here he is," said Mr. Kingston, stooping down and caressing a fine Newfoundland that came bounding through the hall towards him. "You see his coat is quite dry?"

"He came up into the laundry with me, sir, while I did the coat; and the place is so hot he got quite dry in a few minutes."

"That's very unwholesome for the animal," observed Mr. Kingston, looking however somewhat dubious. "How is it he is so dusty now?"

"When we came down from the laundry, sir, he went into the knife-house, where the boys were cleaning the knives, and lay down in the dust."

"Did you go to Admiral Bowline's yesterday?"

"Yes, sir—immediately after you told me."

"Then how is it that I found the letter tossing about in the servants' hall when I went there just now to give some orders?"

"Oh! sir, because I forgot the letter, and did not observe it till I got to the admiral's door. I was just going off again this minute, sir."

"Well, do now, at once: for he has threatened to come up this morning, to pass the day—and you know your mistress can't bear him. By Jove, here he is—hobbling up to the door with his great bamboo cane!"

"I will say you are not at home, sir."

"But your mistress is in the park there—and he has already seen her, no doubt."

"Leave it to me, sir."

Thereupon Mr. Kingston retreated into the dining-room, and John advanced to the front door, which stood open according to custom; and confronting the old Admiral, waited to be questioned. The visitor was a sour-looking snappish old gentleman—very mean—terribly addicted to scandal—and an inveterate dinner-hunter,—such being the character that I heard of him.

"Your master is in, I suppose, John?" he said with an air of confidence that it was so.

"No, sir: master's out."

"Master out? But he knew that I was coming. I wrote and told him so; and if it were not convenient for me to pass the day with him, he would have written to tell me."

"Master couldn't write, sir: he had a very bad arm."

"Well, but your mistress could have written."

"Missus was too busy dressing master's arm, sir."

"Was it an accident, then?"

"Yes, sir: a fall from a horse."

"Then how is it that your master's out, if his arm is so bad?"

"He is gone into Deal, sir, to see Mr. Sands."

"Oh, then he will be back soon, and I will walk in and wait."

"Master won't be at home, sir, all day; he's going on to Margate on very particular business."

"Oh, well then, your mistress will be dull, and all the more glad of company."

"Missus has gone with him, sir," answered John, with the coolest effrontery imaginable.

"You lying scoun—" then suddenly checking himself the admiral said with ill-suppressed anger, "Why, there's your mistress walking down the avenue in her riding-habit."

"No, sir: that's missus's maid."

"The deuce! does the maid dress herself up in her lady's habit, and hat and feathers, during her absence?"

"Well, she has done it, you see, sir: but I hope you won't be hard upon her and tell master or missus when you see them."

"Oh, but I will though!" exclaimed the Admiral, glad of an opportunity to vent his rage upon somebody and at something. "I will walk into the dining-room and sit down a little. I have been an invalid and must rest myself. You can bring me the newspaper, if you have got one less than a week old, which you very seldom have here: and you may bring me too a glass of your home-brewed."

"Better not go in there, sir," said John, not for an instant losing his presence of mind although the crisis was now somewhat ticklish, inasmuch as his master was in the very dining-room to which the Admiral was advancing.

"Better not go in here?" exclaimed the old officer with mingled petulance and astonishment. "And why not?"

"Because, sir," was John's ready reply, "the housekeeper has got the scarlet fever, and she's sitting in there."

"The scarlet fever!" echoed the Admiral. "The deuce she has! Why didn't you tell me that before? The scarlet fever in the house—eh?" and away he hobbled as quickly as his legs would carry him.

John moved not a muscle of his countenance; and the old porter, ensconced in his great leathern chair, appeared to enjoy the scene hugely. Mr. Kingston, who had overheard every syllable, the dining-room door being ajar, could not help laughing as he came forth: but he said, "Good heavens, John, what have you been doing? The report will spread all over the place that the scarlet fever is in the house. You're aware what a gossip the Admiral is."

"Didn't know what to do, sir," was the footman's off-hand response: "was driven into a complete corner—but made sure that the scarlet fever dodge would succeed."

"The Admiral will find out that it's all a story, and we shall offend him mortally. Now I did not wish to do this: for though I do not like him, I cannot forget that he is an old man and an invalid."

"Very sorry, sir," answered John; "but couldn't do better than I did."

Here this scene ended,—a scene of which I was a witness, as I happened to be in the hall at the time with little Catherine, waiting for her pony to come round to the door that she might take an airing upon it. In about a couple of hours Mr. Sands in his gig came tearing up the gravel walk towards the mansion: and perceiving me, as I was walking by the side of the little pony on which the child sat, he drew up.

"Well, Mary," he said, "how do you do? Like

your new place, I suppose? But you must take care of this scarlet fever that's got into the house. Why do you smile? You silly girl, you—I can tell you that it's no laughing matter. But how came your master to hurt his arm? Why what the deuce ails the girl? Here she is laughing again."

At this moment Mr. and Mrs. Kingston galloped up to the spot on their horses; and the squire, laughing heartily, exclaimed in his loud joyous tones, "Ah! I know what you have come for, Sands. The old Admiral has been with you."

"To be sure," answered the medical gentleman. "He came into the surgery puffing and blowing like a grampus, expecting to hear that you had been there about your arm; and finding you had not, he told me that I had better lose no time in rushing up to the Grange; for that Mrs. Taylor had got the scarlet fever. He said too that you and Mrs. Kingston were going on to Margate."

"To tell you the truth," responded the Squire, laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks, "it's all nonsense—"

"Nonsense?" ejaculated the surgeon. "Why, this isn't the first of April. What does the old Admiral mean by coming and making such a fool of me? Just the very day, too, that I am busiest! Seventy patients down on my list and no time to see half of them!"

"It really was not the Admiral's fault," said Mrs. Kingston, who was likewise laughing almost as heartily as her husband. "It was that rogue John, who in denying us to the Admiral, gave such scope to his inventive powers."

"I understand! That footman of your's is the greatest liar in existence. You should get rid of him. But depend upon it that the news are all over Deal and Walmer by this time that the scarlet fever is in the house; and you will be shunned as if you carried the pestilence about with you. Mrs. Mildmay will have fine food for gossiping now."

"Pray do get us out of this scrape, my dear Mr. Sands," said Mrs. Kingston. "You are sure to meet the Admiral again presently: tell him that it turned out not to be the scarlet fever after all."

"Well, well," cried Mr. Sands, "leave it to me:"—and wheeling his gig rapidly round, he dashed away again at a furious rate and soon disappeared from our view.

"Ten to one," exclaimed the Squire, "that we shall have the Admiral up here again presently. Mary, just go up to the house and tell John that if Admiral Bowline calls again, he is to be admitted—we shall be at home to him this time."

"As it is such a beautiful day," added Mrs. Kingston, "you can let Kate stop out as long as she likes."

The Squire and his wife then galloped away, and passing out of the park, took a scamper across the country. I went up to the house to deliver the message according to my master's instructions; and having done so, took the child with her pony for another circuit of the park. Thus three more hours passed away; and at the expiration of that time little Kate had had quite enough of her pony for the morning—so we returned to the house. But at the very minute we reached the front door of the mansion, who should be hobbling up the steps but Admiral Bowline? John instantaneously came



forth, his countenance made up to meet the old officer with the requisite amount of effrontery.

"Why, how is this?" demanded the Admiral. "I met Mr. Sands just now, and he tells me that he saw your master and mistress riding about in the park. I thought they had gone to Margate."

"They changed their minds, sir, and came back."

"But the Squire's arm—it's nothing at all—a mere sprain, Mr. Sands says."

"Yes, sir—nothing but a sprain. But master sometimes makes a great deal of a trifle."

"But the scarlet fever," pursued the Admiral,—"it seems that it was no such thing after all."

"No, sir—nothing but the measles."

"The measles!" ejaculated the Admiral, suddenly becoming aghast: and he reflected for a few moments. "Ah, I recollect—I have had the measles—and people don't have them twice. Is the housekeeper very bad with them?"

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"Not so very bad, sir. She has got much better since you was here just now."

At this very moment Mrs. Taylor herself made her appearance in the hall and advanced towards the old porter, to whom she had something to say.

"Good heavens! are you mad?" exclaimed the Admiral, shrinking back in dismay. "Why, my good woman, how can you go walking about like this with the measles?"

"The measles, sir!" echoed the astonished Mrs. Taylor: "the measles? It's many a long year since I had them."

"Why, the footman here tells me that you have got them now."

"I didn't say the housekeeper, sir," observed John, as coolly as possible.

"You didn't say the housekeeper?" ejaculated the Admiral, perfectly bewildered. "Then whom did you say?"

"The cook, sir."

"The cook! Oh, then they will go all round the kitchen. I *did* mean to stop to dinner: but I—I would rather not:"—and with an ill-suppressed rage at this new disappointment, the old Admiral once more hurried away as quick as his hobbling gait would carry him.

"There's a pretty thing you've done, John," said Mrs. Taylor. "How on earth can you stand there and tell such dreadful stories?"

"I was obliged to say something," replied the footman: "but I must confess it was unfortunate to fix upon the cook."

"Here come the Squire and missus," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Taylor. "They will meet the Admiral, and there'll be an explanation."

So it appears there was: for as I looked round I saw Mr. and Mrs. Kingston stop their horses and speak to the old officer. How they managed to extricate themselves from this new dilemma into which John's too ready invention had plunged them, I know not: certain however it is that they contrived to satisfy Admiral Bowline by some means or another; for he turned and walked by their side up to the mansion, where he remained and passed the rest of the day.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

MRS. MILDMAY.

AT about a mile from Deal, in the direction of Dover, is situated the beautiful and picturesque little village of Walmer—a name well known throughout the country on account of the castle which is close by and is the seat of the Warden of the Cinq Ports. That village is principally inhabited by half-pay officers in the navy, and families with small incomes but able to live in what is termed a "genteel style." The society is (to use another cant term of fashion) very "select:" that is to say, comprising only those who are known to be gentlemen and ladies by birth; for if a retired tradesman with thousands a-year should take up his residence at Walmer, he would not be visited by those village exclusives. In a small community like that, where the sources of amusement or recreation are few enough, and these consisting of parties which only serve to while away the evenings, thus leaving the days to be disposed of somehow or another, the habit of gossiping is certain to grow into inveteracy. So it was at Walmer. There never was so much scandal in so small a place. Of all guests at every house, the scandal-monger was the most acceptable. Nor was this habit confined to elderly ladies or old maids: it had fastened upon the young as well, and prevailed amongst both sexes. At dinner-parties reputations were cut up with as little remorse as legs of mutton; and at tea-parties the affairs of others were discussed with more relish than the muffins. Neighbour was incessantly talking of neighbour. The amounts of incomes were conjectured—dress was criticised—the private affairs of "dear friends" were openly canvassed—secrets were betrayed—confidence was violated—even virtue was slandered: but the rumour of the smallest peccadillo on the part of an acquaintance was certain to be hailed with infinite rapture, as affording food for

at least a month's gossip at every house in the village.

The reader who has understood the honest, straight-forward, and even blunt characters of the Squire and Mrs. Kingston, cannot be surprised if they frequently caused "not at home" to be the answer given to the visits of their Walmer acquaintances. Nor less were they compelled to adopt the same course in respect to many of their Deal friends: for in the town the habit of gossiping, tittle-tattling, and scandal-bearing, was pretty nearly as rife as in the village. Many of these gossips affected to hate gossiping in others, and actually seemed unaware that they themselves were gossips of the very first water. They would not or could not see that the habit was distasteful to the Kingstons; and therefore they were not deterred by the frequent answers of "not at home," from calling again and again at the Grange in the hope of finding Mrs. Kingston visible at last and inveighing her into a chat about all things and all persons in the neighbourhood. It was in consequence of the necessity for these frequent denials that the head footman had become so marvellously expert in devising excuses.

There was one lady in the village who, if possible, was more given to scandal-mongering than all the rest; and at the same time she was the veriest busy-body that ever was known. She endeavoured to insinuate herself into the confidence of all her friends and acquaintances, whose private affairs she seemed to make entirely her own. Nobody could do anything well unless by her advice or assistance: she thrust herself everywhere and interfered with everything. Nothing was too minute for her friendly cognizance—nothing too insignificant for her watchful solicitude. She fancied herself necessary to all around her, and succeeded in making many believe that she was so. There are in this world lazy, indolent, and ignorant persons who never can think for themselves, but adopt the views and opinions of others: and there is another class of people who never can act or do anything for themselves, but get others to do it for them. To these two sorts of persons Mrs. Mildmay was invaluable: she thought for the former and acted for the latter. She was a kind of universal agent and female factotum. She assiduously and perseveringly made love matches amongst her friends, but as often ruined them by her backbiting and scandal ere they reached the crowning point of marriage. If a tutor or governess were wanted in a family, Mrs. Mildmay could at once recommend either: when children were to be sent to school, she knew the best school to send them to. When new families settled in the village she recommended tradespeople of all descriptions—superintended their parties—and gave them lists of whom to invite and whom to eschew. She was also in her own person a complete register-office for servants, having always "eligible ones" to recommend. The carriages of the very few families who kept any were of course always at the service of "that dear good Mrs. Mildmay;" and as the only way in which her kind attentions could be rewarded was by making her presents, she managed to come in for a great many good things. But then Mrs. Mildmay was so very independent that whenever she received anything she must give something in return. Thus, if the

gift to herself was a silver teapot, she in return would bestow a pincushion worked with her own industrious fingers: or again, if the present to herself was a fine turkey at Christmas, she in return would send a pasteboard card-rack with beautiful pink ribbons, also her own handiwork. Perhaps the gift from some grateful family to Mrs. Mildmay would be a couple of handsome porcelain vases—in return for which she was sure to send the most elegant and beautiful pen-wiper or kettle-holder that her fingers could possibly make or that an outlay of threepence could possibly buy. But thus always returning gift for gift, Mrs. Mildmay satisfied herself that she thoroughly preserved her independence.

But Mrs. Mildmay was not without her secret enemies and detractors; and it will no doubt strike the reader as positively shocking that so useful a lady should have had her motives so cruelly interpreted as they were by her very dearest friends in the pleasant village of Walmer. It was actually whispered that, her husband's income being only two hundred a-year, the gifts and presents were very serviceable indeed—that the schools which she so extensively patronized, educated her own children at half price—that the tradesmen whom she so exclusively recommended, allowed her a handsome discount on her quarterly bills—and that even the very servants for whom she procured such good places, found some means, trifling though they might be, of testifying their gratitude. But then, as scandal declared, they were all fish that came into Mrs. Mildmay's net.

Such was the presiding genius of the gossiping community at Walmer. She was a little, thin, active woman—not very bad-looking—of genteel appearance—perfectly lady-like in her manners—and a good dresser. She was about eight-and-thirty years of age, and had a whole swarm of children. Her husband presented a most extraordinary contrast to herself: for he was a great, heavy, stolid-looking man—very slow in his movements—very taciturn—very indolent—and very stupid. He had never done anything to earn a shilling nor to increase his income: what he possessed he had inherited from his father—and priding himself upon having been born a gentleman, he of course could not have thought of embarking in anything like trade or commercial speculation, and therefore preferred remaining a poor gentleman and letting his wife eke out their limited means in the various ways already described.

One day Mrs. Kingston took it into her head to have a good walk instead of a ride into the country,—chiefly I believe that she might have the pleasure of accompanying little Kate in her usual airing upon the pony. She accordingly gave me the requisite instructions, as I was to accompany her. We set off—Kate upon the pony, Mrs. Kingston walking by the side, and myself a little way in the rear. She did not however long let me keep at that respectful distance; but with her wonted off-hand affability and goodness, suddenly said, "Don't linger behind like that, Mary: come and walk on the other side of the pony, so that if I have anything to say to you I need not keep turning round."

I did as my mistress desired; and she began to converse with as much frankness as if I were her equal. To my surprise she talked of books; and I

soon found that she had some knowledge beyond that of horses. In fact she was evidently an intelligent, well educated, and clever woman; and in less than half-an-hour I felt truly delighted with her conversation. To use a familiar phrase, she drew me out,—so that I was led to show that I also had profited by my reading. I named my favourite authors; and when she found that these were chiefly historians and the best poets, as well as essayists and biographers, she expressed her surprise and gratification in terms sufficiently complimentary and flattering to myself. She appeared to become interested in me, and asked me in a delicate manner several questions relative to my past history. I related some of my adventures; and she was much surprised and amused by the recital.

In this conversation we passed out of the park and proceeded along the road towards Walmer, which was about two miles distant. We had accomplished more than half of that interval, when all of a sudden Mrs. Kingston exclaimed, "I do believe here is this odious Mrs. Mildmay with her stupid husband!"

I raised my eyes, and beheld advancing the gentleman and lady whom I have already described, but whom I now saw for the first time.

"My dear Mrs. Kingston," cried Mrs. Mildmay, quitting her husband's arm and hastening forward, "how do you do? It is quite an age since I saw you. And you walking?—dear me, what a miracle! I hope your favourite horse is not dead—or that you have not been thrown and taken a distaste for riding? Do tell me how it is:"—and as she spoke she kept shaking Mrs. Kingston's hand with a warmth that would have been affectionate indeed if it were sincere.

"The simple reason of my walking instead of riding," answered Mrs. Kingston, "is that I fancied it."

"How strange!" cried Mrs. Mildmay. "I really did not think that you ever had whims and fancies. But I and Mr. Mildmay were actually and positively coming across to pop in at the Grange. For the last half-dozen times that we have called, we have always been unfortunate enough to find that you were out: and as cards got lost and servants forget to deliver messages, we feared lest you should be ignorant that we did call and think us very rude and very neglectful. So, as it is such a fine frosty day, I said to Mr. Mildmay after breakfast this morning, 'We will just walk over and call upon our dear friends the Kingstons.' So now we will continue our walk with you as far as the Grange."

By this time Mr. Mildmay, who advanced at a snail's pace, had come up to the spot where we had halted; and shaking Mrs. Kingston by the hand, he observed "that it was very fine weather for the time of year," and then held his peace.

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Mildmay, "what a sweet rosy colour this love of a child has got. I really must kiss her. But excuse me, my dear Mrs. Kingston, I do not think this kind of bonnet is suitable for such a darling chubby face. It looks like one of Pritchard's bonnets; and I am sure that if you only patronized Mrs. Simcox you would like her bonnets best. I must tell Mrs. Simcox to come up and show you some. She will be quite delighted. You need not buy anything of her at once, unless you like: she won't mind the trouble. And by the

bye, when I think of it she has got some beautiful little riding hats that would suit your other three loves of girls. I must positively send Mrs. Simcox to you to-morrow."

"Pray, Mrs. Mildmay, do not give yourself the trouble——"

"Trouble, my dear friend! the trouble will be a pleasure. She shall positively wait upon you to-morrow."

"But I have always dealt with the Pritchards, as you surmised——"

"Oh! but one goes where one can get the best things; and you must really give the Simcoxes a turn. But I see," added Mrs. Mildmay, with a half-averted countenance and in a lower tone, "that you have got a new nurse-maid. Dear me, I wish I had known that you wanted one. Why didn't you drop me a note? You know the pleasure I have in serving my friends; and there is just at this moment such a nice, genteel, respectable girl who wants just such a situation. I happen to know it, because her mother is the sister of the man that married my cook about seven years ago."

"I can assure you," answered Mrs. Kingston, speaking loud enough for me to hear, because she perceived that I could not avoid catching every word that Mrs. Mildmay had uttered,—"I can assure you that I am so well suited with this young person here, that it will not be my fault if we part. She is the best that ever entered my nursery."

"Oh, I am delighted to hear it!" exclaimed Mrs. Mildmay. "But by the bye, you know not how distressed we were the other day when that dear kind old soul the Admiral dropped in and told us that the scarlet fever was in your house. We should have run up to see you at once—only Mr. Mildmay and myself have both such a horror of anything like a fever. However, we saw the Admiral again yesterday; and he told us that it was nothing of the sort after all—merely the mistake of one of your footmen. So as there is no fever at the Grange we decided upon calling to-day. By the bye, talking of footmen, reminds me that—but pray excuse me for what I am going to say—I hear that you are going to part with that footman because he tells such dreadful wicked stories——"

"Indeed, Mrs. Mildmay," interrupted my mistress, somewhat coldly and distantly, "you have heard quite wrong. We have no intention——"

"Oh, well—I only thought that if you had, Mr. Mildmay happens to know at this moment a very nice steady young man who wants just such a place. How we happen to know it is that he is the brother of our baker's boy, and the baker's boy told our cook——But when I think of it, have you heard that the Griggs have run away owing twenty-five pounds to that poor baker? Such an exposure! They have left no end of debts behind them. There's the butcher in for thirty-seven pounds—there's the grocer for nineteen—there's the milliner for forty-four—and what is worse still, they are all tradesmen that I had recommended them."

"In that case," observed Mrs. Kingston, with the least dash of irony in her tone, "I should be careful in future how I recommended tradesmen to newcomers."

"Oh! but who would have thought this of the Griggs? They seemed such very particular people—always at church morning and afternoon

on Sunday—always giving their little party regularly once a fortnight—always the first to buy green peas and asparagus the moment they came into season—and Mrs. Griggs was always the first to catch up the newest fashions—Dear me! who would have thought it? But one ceases to be surprised at anything in this world. Would you believe that the match between Mr. Styles and Miss Marigold is broken off, just because I happened to say the other day to Mrs. French that Miss Marigold had such a *very* red nose malicious people *might* say she drank; and Mrs. French was so foolish as to go and tell Mrs. Popkins that I said Miss Marigold *did* drink; and Mrs. Popkins thought she was doing a friendly act by whispering a word of caution to Mr. Styles's sister—who by the bye has got horrid red hair—and the sister set her brother against the match, and so it's all broken off. It's really very provoking—the more so because it was I who first introduced Mr. Styles and Miss Marigold to each other; and thinking they would make a happy couple, did all I could to persuade Styles to propose. But between you and me, my dear Mrs. Kingston, it may be all for the best: for I *had* noticed that Miss Marigold never let the tray of negus pass her when it was handed round at my little evening parties. Of course that struck me as odd——"

"Did you not mean your negus to be partaken of?" asked Mrs. Kingston, in a good-humoured manner, but still the words themselves conveyed a sort of reproof.

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Mrs. Mildmay. "Heaven forbid that I should be mean! I am not like those Perkinses, who invite sixty people to their house when with all the crowding possible thirty cannot comfortably squeeze themselves into their two paltry little rooms; and then their negus isn't drinkable, it's so weak—and they have about a dozen glasses for their sixty guests. By the bye, the eldest Miss Perkins—Charlotte her name is—has gone up to London on a visit for a few months to an aunt. I don't like to be ungenerous—and nobody hates scandal more than myself—but I did hear from Mrs. French, who was told by Mrs. Popkins, who had it direct from the ironer, who was told by the woman who washes for the Perkinses, that Miss Charlotte had rather a good reason for going away. Not that I should be over-ready to believe poor dear old Mrs. French: for between you and me, Mrs. Kingston, she is the greatest storyteller in all Walmer. And then, as for Mrs. Popkins, she is an excellent-hearted creature, but apt to draw the long bow a bit—particularly after tea; and I *was* told—I don't know how true it may be—that she drinks her tea as strong as brandy when she is alone, and that it has a very brandified smell too—rather different than when it came from the grocer's. For I know that Mrs. Popkins only buys the four-and-sixpenny black. The grocer told me so, at the very same time that he hinted to me that the Richardsons, who have taken the new house down in the hollow going towards the castle, have not yet paid their last Christmas bill, and here we are close upon another Christmas."

While this conversation was going on, my mistress had turned the pony round, and we were now retracing our way to the Grange. Mr. Mildmay walked behind, never once opening his lips, except

to observe what a beautiful tail the pony had. Mrs. Kingston suffered Mrs. Mildmay to rattle on, evidently in despair of being enabled to stop her; and therefore this lady, finding she had it all her own way, continued to talk with the most wondrous volubility.

"They say that the Duke of Wellington is coming to pass the Christmas holidays at the Castle. I do hope it's true, for it makes Walmer so gay. Depend upon it if his Grace does come, you will see Mrs. Kitson and the whole bevy of her girls dressed out in new finery at church on the first Sunday of his Grace's visit. For my part I can't fancy how the Kitsons do it. Everybody knows that poor Colonel Kitson has got little more than his half-pay, and that the eldest son Reginald has been a sad wild fellow at college, costing his father a deal of money. It was a bad thing for Ellen Kitson that the match didn't come off with Sir Tobias Skeffington. Heaven knows that she can lay her hand upon her heart and declare most conscientiously that it wasn't for want of setting her cap at him. Sir Tobias seemed to be much smitten with her at first. I offered my advice to Ellen Kitson in a most friendly way: but she gave herself great airs and told me to mind my own business. Was there ever anything so rude—so uncivil? And when Sir Tobias confidentially asked me what was my private opinion of Ellen, and whether she would make a good wife, it was natural enough that I should answer candidly, and say that she had a very bad temper and gave herself great airs. Of course I didn't think that Sir Tobias would take the thing so serious: but he did, and left Walmer the very next morning. Not but that it would have been a wretched match on both sides: for, as dear Mrs. Popkins told me, Sir Tobias never went to bed sober and used to swear horribly. By the bye, my dear Mrs. Kingston, have you called yet on the Lovells?"

"No: I really have no wish to increase the number of my acquaintances," replied my mistress: and then she added, after a moment's pause and in a somewhat pointed manner, "I have too many already."

"Dear me, I have dropped my pocket-handkerchief!" suddenly cried Mrs. Mildmay; and looking back she saw it lying in the road a few yards behind.

She hastened to pick it up; and Mrs. Kingston, taking advantage of the opportunity, hurriedly whispered to me, "Mary, these odious people will stay to dinner if nothing is done to prevent them—and they will drive the Squire mad. Hasten onward and tell him they are coming. He will devise some excuse."

Accordingly, as soon as we entered the park, I walked on in advance, and reached the Grange a few minutes before my mistress and her companions. The Squire was at the very moment crossing the hall; and I delivered his wife's message.

"The Mildmays!" he ejaculated. "I would as soon have the pestilence come into the place. Here, John! John!—where is that rascal John?"

"Here, sir," was the answer: and the individual himself stood forward.

"John, did you hear what Mary said? The Mildmays are coming."

"Very good, sir."

"But you know that I hate and abominate the Mildmays."

"Yes, sir."

"Then for heaven's sake say something to prevent them staying—make some statement to your mistress—anything that comes into your head—she will understand you. But no scarlet fever or measles, mind."

"No, sir. Shall I say the cholera morbus is in the house?"

"No, no, John—nothing of that kind. Let your ingenuity go upon another tack. But here they are. I must beat a retreat."

With these words the Squire disappeared; and John planted himself on the threshold of the front door. I descended the steps ready to receive little Catherine as she came up on her pony; and I frankly confess that I afterwards lingered in the hall to hear how the imaginative footman would acquit himself upon the present occasion. Mrs. Kingston subsequently told me that she saw by John's looks there was some story in preparation and she could scarcely keep her own countenance in consequence of a violent inclination to laugh.

"Please, ma'am," said John, addressing his mistress in a very mysterious tone, "the Archbishop of Canterbury has come."

"The Archbishop of Canterbury!" exclaimed Mrs. Mildmay, pressing forward—actually pushing her husband aside on the one hand, and partially doing the same to Mrs. Kingston on the other. "Did you say the Archbishop of Canterbury is here?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered John, as grave as the great ecclesiastic himself of whom he was speaking could possibly be.

"Dear me, how delightful!" said Mrs. Mildmay. "I shall be so charmed to be introduced to his Grace—"

"But he has got his four chaplains with him, ma'am," continued John.

"Four chaplains?" echoed Mrs. Mildmay.

"Yes, ma'am—and a bishop, a dean, and an arch-deacon."

"Only think! Why, my dear Mrs. Kingston, your house is full of Church dignitaries. What can this be for? I did not know that you were even acquainted with the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"They are all in earnest consultation with the Squire," continued John; "and they are going to dine here."

"Oh, that *is* charming!" said Mrs. Mildmay: then turning to her husband, she added in the same breath, "How fortunate that we should have come across to the Grange to-day! What news for dear Mrs. French, and Mrs. Popkins, and the Kitsons, and the Styleeses, and the Lovells, and the Richardsons, and all the rest of them!"

"Please, ma'am," said the imperturbable John, again addressing himself to his mistress, "master hopes that you will superintend the arrangements for the dinner yourself. His Grace the Archbishop wishes to be quite private, and insists upon dining alone with yourself and master and his own suite."

Here Mrs. Mildmay threw a look of mingled deprecation and entreaty upon Mrs. Kingston, and then said, "Oh, of course—I understand—his Grace

does not wish a regular formal affair. But any friends who might happen to be here at the time, are naturally to be excepted from this ban of exclusion."

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said John, still addressing Mrs. Kingston; "but master's instructions are positive. His Grace the Archbishop will not meet any strangers."

Mrs. Kingston knew not what to say or what to do: she felt a violent inclination to burst out laughing, for she saw that Mrs. Mildmay firmly believed every word that John was saying; and, as she afterwards informed me, she felt exceedingly awkward and embarrassed, scarcely able to restrain an outburst of merriment on the one hand, and fearing that the joke was being carried too far on the other.

"You hear what the servant says," she at length observed to Mrs. Mildmay. "It's really very provoking, and I am exceedingly sorry: but what can I do?"

"Oh! it's impossible we can be deprived of the pleasure of meeting his Grace, and he cannot be so rude as to wish us to be excluded. Here—I have it! Mr. Mildmay," she continued, turning to her husband, "give me your card."

"My card—eh, my dear?" said Mr. Mildmay, who looked very much like a man just wakened up from a slumber.

"Yes, your card—quick, quick. There—that's right. Now, John," continued the bustling Mrs. Mildmay, giving the card to the footman, "take this into his Grace, and say that Mr. Mildmay, one of the oldest and most respectable inhabitants of Walmer, is exceedingly desirous of paying his respects to his Grace, having a great veneration for his Grace's high office, sacred character, eloquent preaching, and so on. You must also say that Mr. Mildmay is cousin to one of the minor canons of York Cathedral, and that his uncle is rector of Pogis-cum-Bogis in Devonshire. Under all these circumstances his Grace cannot possibly refuse to see Mr. Mildmay."

"I will go and inquire, ma'am," said John, not a muscle of whose countenance moved throughout this ludicrous scene; and taking the card, he at once passed into the dining-room, opening the door with as much respectful noiselessness and cautious slowness as if all the Church dignitaries he had specified were really and truly there. Closing the door behind him, he remained in the room for about three minutes; and when he re-appeared he paused upon the threshold, holding the room door half open and turning round with his face inward, with the air of a person receiving a message or instructions from some one within. Then he bowed and said, "Yes, my lord,"—then seemed to remain listening still—then bowing again, said, "Yes, your Grace,"—and then leaving the room altogether, closed the door behind him.

All the while this ridiculous bye-play to the empty room was going on, Mrs. Mildmay kept her eyes fixed with a most eager intentness upon the dining-room door so long as John was inside the apartment; and then upon John himself when he came forth again and performed the solemn farce on the threshold which I have just described. But when he turned round again, shut the door, and advanced across the hall, it would be impossible to describe the look of suspense, amounting almost to a sort

of feverish agony, that appeared upon Mrs. Mildmay's features. As for her husband, he the while appeared to be fast asleep.

"Well, John," said Mrs. Mildmay, as the footman approached with a very grave and solemn countenance, "what is the answer?"

"Please, ma'am, the Lord Archbishop says that he has often heard Mr. Mildmay's name mentioned in the most flattering terms, especially in the highest circles, and that therefore nothing would give his Grace greater pleasure than to meet Mr. and Mrs. Mildmay at dinner to-day. But as his lordship has most particular reasons for being altogether private, he hopes Mr. and Mrs. Mildmay will excuse him. His lordship ordered me to assure you, ma'am, that the very next time he comes to Walmer he will make a point of taking a friendly cup of tea at your house."

Mrs. Kingston turned away, being overcome with a sudden fit of coughing: the old hall-porter literally rolled over and buried his head in the cushion of his sentry-box chair: I myself could scarcely restrain a laugh;—but John remained imperturbable as ever.

"Well, at all events," said Mrs. Mildmay, "this is a most flattering message from the Lord Archbishop; and I shall take care that when he does come to Walmer again, he shall keep his promise. Mr. Mildmay, did you hear what was said? Our name is favourably mentioned in the highest circles."

"I am very glad of it, my dear," observed her husband, scarcely seeming to understand what had been told him.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Kingston," continued Mrs. Mildmay, "after all that has been said, we couldn't of course think of intruding any longer. So we will come over another day and pass an hour or two with you."

With these words she shook hands very cordially with Mrs. Kingston and hurried away, evidently believing every syllable that had been uttered, and fully consoled for the loss of a dinner by the reflection that the Archbishop would certainly drink tea with her the next time he came in the neighbourhood of Walmer.

So soon as she had taken her departure, followed by her husband, Mrs. Kingston said, "Really, John, you have gone too far. It will get all over the place, and some one will be finding out that the Archbishop was far away at the time—"

"Didn't know what to say, ma'am," replied John. "Master wouldn't have the scarlet fever or measles in the house again; and when I suggested the cholera, master thought it was too strong."

Mrs. Kingston said no more: for she doubtless saw the injustice of blaming the servant in the matter. She hastened to join her husband and tell him all that had occurred; but the moment she had left the hall, John said to the porter, "The next time I will have the cholera dodge, you may depend upon it!"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

LOVE'S TEARS AND SADNESS.

I MAY take this opportunity of observing that ever since our interview at Ashford upwards of a year back, Eustace had regularly written once a fortnight, and sometimes indeed oftener. His letters were ever of the most affectionate character, but manly in their style—honest and frank in their assurances of unceasing love. They were not perhaps exactly the class of love-letters which boarding-school misses are apt to picture to themselves as models of that class of epistles: for there was never any sickly sentimentalism in those missives—no poetry—no tender quotations from Byron or Moore. They were letters which a well educated, intelligent, and high-minded young gentleman might have been expected to write to a young person of my unromantic character and plain unassuming disposition.

One morning I received a letter the address of which was in the well known writing of Eustace. Hastily tearing it open, I was smitten with a painful feeling on reading the very first lines, for they prepared me for some unpleasant announcement which was to follow. No change in Eustace's sentiments, reader—do not fear that; but the sad and heartrending intelligence that his regiment had been suddenly ordered to embark for India! Eustace went on to state that he had not the slightest doubt his father had by some means or another made interest with the Commander-in-Chief in order to procure this arrangement, with the hope that a long separation, of perhaps some years, would have the effect of altering his son's sentiments in respect to me: but this Eustace assured me could never be the case under any circumstances. He said that it was certainly possible for him to avoid going to India by either resigning his commission, or procuring an exchange into another regiment; but were he to adopt this course, he should suffer in the esteem of those who regarded the military service in a more serious and honourable light than as a mere plaything for the scions of the aristocracy. He did not wish to be looked upon as a drawing-room officer—one of those exquisites who could not possibly think of daring the dangers of a long sea-voyage or encountering the hardships of foreign service. He had therefore made up his mind to accompany his regiment to India: but he besought that he might *not* go alone. He conjured me, if I valued his happiness, to consent to become his wife at once, and proceed with him to those Oriental climes to which he was about to repair. Finally, he said that by the time I received his letter his regiment would have left its Irish quarters for England, and that in ten days it was to embark at Gravesend, whence the ship would pass round to the Downs (the anchorage off Deal) where it would probably remain two or three days.

I was as much bewildered as afflicted by this intelligence. I shed a torrent of tears over the letter; and then, so soon as my feelings were somewhat composed, deliberated with myself how I should act. I felt on the one hand that so much devoted affection as Eustace had shown me ought to be allowed to a certain extent to plead for itself; and that as he

appealed to me on the score that his happiness was at stake, such a representation was not to be regarded otherwise than as one of a solemn and serious character. But on the other hand, there were many reasons which urged me still to counsel a postponement of our marriage. All the reasons that I had ever previously urged for such delay still existed in full force,—the dread that I entertained of producing an irreparable breach between Eustace and his parents—the certainty that the allowance he had received from his father would be withdrawn—and the fear of beholding him compelled to struggle against pecuniary difficulties, having to support a wife upon nothing but his pay. Nor did I forget that withering malediction which Lady Wilberton menaced me with, should I espouse her son,—a malediction which had often sounded since in my ears, and which now appeared to ring there again more like a funeral-knell than ever. Nor was this all. I felt that if on the one hand I ought to yield to the urgent entreaties of a lover, yet on the other hand I had duties to perform towards a brother and two sisters,—for, alas! I could not include Robert in the sphere to which my influence thus extended. It was impossible that I could leave England so long as the interests of William, Sarah, and Jane required to be looked after. Heaven knows how confidently I felt that my dear brother William was steady enough, and was certain to do his best on behalf of his two sisters: but still I knew that the care of a brother would not be the same as the more delicate supervision and vigilant solicitude of an elder sister. Besides, a thousand casualties might happen: Mr. Sands might die, and then both William and Jane would be thrown upon their own resources—and I had seen too much within the last few weeks of the horrors of poverty, not to shudder at the idea of their becoming exposed to the same terrible ordeal. Again, Sarah might lose her situation at Talbot Abbey; and I could not conceal from myself that it would be the height of imprudence and impropriety to leave her altogether to the impulses of her own wayward will and proud spirit. I knew that if she had already rebelled against my right to counsel and advise her, she would prove still less obedient to the suggestions of William, who was but two years older than herself. Altogether, therefore, for the sake of these three orphans who were so dear to me, and towards whom I was bound to replace as much as possible the supervising care of a lost mother, I felt that it was impossible for me to enter the marriage state as yet and proceed to India.

Eustace had desired me, at the conclusion of his letter, to direct my answer to him at a particular hotel in London where he should be by the time it was there. I did so. Carefully and earnestly was my response written. I explained to him all the reasons above set forth—assuring him that if in again beseeching that we should wait for a more auspicious period to proceed to the altar, I was rendering him unhappy, my own unhappiness at the idea of separation, with so wide an interval of space between us, was not one atom less. I implored him to regard my conduct as being dictated solely by love and prudence in respect to himself, and by a sense of duty towards my brother and sisters. I delicately bade him reflect that devotedly attached to him as I was, I could throw no obstacle in the

way of our union if my own inclinations were alone consulted: in fact, I observed that it was even natural I should desire to enjoy the happiness and honour of becoming his wife, and that therefore it was from motives purely disinterested and conscientious that I was compelled to recommend a further delay.

Oh! need I tell the reader how bitterly I wept while penning this letter, or what violence I did to my own feelings in thus yielding to a stern sense of duty? Upon this head I will not linger. Suffice it to say that it was with the utmost difficulty I could so far compose my countenance for that day and the three or four following ones, so as to conceal my grief from my mistress and my fellow-servants. At length an answer came from Eustace: he had not reached London quite so soon as he had expected, and hence the delay in replying to my letter. He declared that he was well-nigh overwhelmed with grief at the thought of having to repair to India without me; but that on the other hand he could not help admitting the validity of my arguments, as a whole, on behalf of a farther procrastination of our marriage until a more auspicious period. He told me that the regiment was to embark at Gravesend on the following day, and that he, being the junior captain, found himself compelled to accompany it, so that he should not be enabled to proceed to Deal by land or take up his quarters in the town until the ship finally sailed, as the senior officers would do. But he added that so soon as the vessel did anchor in the Downs, he should take means to let me know, leaving the arrangement of an interview as to time and place entirely to myself.

It was therefore a consolation to reflect that I should see Eustace before he bade farewell to his native shores,—I should see him, and we could renew in words those protestations of unchangeable attachment which we recorded in our correspondence. In three or four days I received another letter, delivered by a messenger who waited for the answer. It was from Eustace, and was dated from the *Three Kings Hotel* in Deal. The ship had arrived in the Downs the evening before, and he had come on shore for a few hours that he might immediately have an opportunity of communicating with me. This happened to be on a Saturday; and I had no difficulty in obtaining from Mrs. Kingston leave of absence for the next day. Of course I did not tell her what it was for—nor did she ask me: knowing that I had a brother and sister in the town, she naturally supposed that my object was to see them. But where should I meet Eustace? As our engagement was kept altogether secret, for many obvious reasons, I felt all the inconvenience of running the risk of being seen, by any persons who knew me, in company with a handsome young officer: for what opinion would be formed of me, a humble servant-maid, if recognized in such society? I recollected the wide wild waste of the Sand-hills, and accordingly specified that place as suitable for our meeting,—adding that I would be there on the following day at twelve o'clock. Having finished my letter, I gave it to the messenger, who forthwith took his departure.

When it was known amongst the servants that I was going out for a day's holiday, Luke the groom found an opportunity of telling me that the chaise-

cart and the old roan, together with himself as driver, were all at my service if I chose to command them: but I declined, thanking him for his consideration and assuring him that as the weather was so fine I would rather walk. I rose before it was light in the morning, and immediately after breakfast set out on my way to Deal. In an hour I reached worthy Mrs. Scudder's cottage; for I knew that William and Jane would be at church, and I therefore proposed to visit them after my interview with Eustace. Mrs. Scudder, I was well aware, would be at home, as it was her habit to go to afternoon service. The worthy widow was delighted to see me. It was exactly a month since I had left her little abode; and during that interval I had not asked for a holiday, and therefore had not been in the town. I found her in much better spirits than when I had left her; for she had heard from her son at Portsmouth, who had quite recovered and held out hopes of shortly being enabled to visit his parent. She showed me his letter, but as I read it, I could not help thinking that there was a certain under-current of mournfulness in it, the evidence of a bruised if not broken spirit. This however the poor woman herself observed not; and I did not of course make any comment upon the subject.

As the hour approached for my meeting with Eustace, I took leave of Mrs. Scudder, and then walked forth upon the sand-hills. It was a fine frosty day in the month of December—the sky was clear, cloudless, and of a beautiful blue—the sun was shining, but not with power enough to unbind the wintry spell which made the earth as hard as marble. As I advanced upon the sand-hills I soon perceived an officer in his uniform hastening towards me—in another minute I recognised the slender, graceful, elegant figure;—and in a few moments more I was clasped in Captain Quentin's arms.

"Mary, dearest Mary," he said, so soon as the first gush of blissful emotions had somewhat subsided, "this is at least a happiness—but, alas, how transient! Oh, think not that I purpose to combat the arguments you have used in your letters, or to dissuade you from the course which you feel to be that of duty. No: I can appreciate all that is noble and generous in your conduct—and the more I think of it, the more does it make me love and admire you!"

"Eustace," I answered, an indescribable thrill of mingled gratitude and joy passing through my heart as he thus spoke, "I am glad that my conduct meets your approval."

"Oh! my beloved Mary," he exclaimed, "you know that it would be the happiest moment of my life to call you mine: but alas! I perceive that you have a duty to perform towards those who to a certain extent are dependent upon your counsel and your example, and that the performance of this duty rules you as it were with a stern compulsion. And it is because you submit to this duty and perform it with such cheerful resignation, that you are admirable in my eyes. A good sister, Mary, will make a good wife—and every phase of your conduct shows me the treasure that I shall possess when the happy time arrives for us to be united."

I pressed Quentin's hand in silent and tearful gratitude; for my heart was too full to allow me to give verbal expression to my feelings.



"But, Oh!" he continued, his voice suddenly becoming deeply mournful, "how sad, how sad it is to think of this dreadful separation! It was miserable enough when I parted from you a year ago at Ashford, and when it was merely to be a distance of three or four hundred miles between us, with all the facilities of frequent correspondence. But now that we are about to separate, and that the distance will swell into thousands and thousands of miles, and that our letters must be few and far between—Oh! Mary, dear Mary," he added with impassioned vehemence, "I cannot bear to think of it—it is more than I can endure!"

"And yet we must resign ourselves, dearest Eustace," I answered, my voice clouded with subdued sobs,—“yes, we must resign ourselves to this separation—must we not, dear Eustace? Oh, I admired the honourable, the lofty, and the noble motives which decided you to accompany your regiment. Heaven knows that it would be to me a

source of indescribable happiness were you to remain in England; but you could not with credit to yourself have shrunk from the duties of the profession to which you belong. I admire you, therefore, for thus acting; but at the same time, dear Eustace, the cause of my admiration is likewise one of deep, deep sorrow!"—and now my tears fell thick and fast.

"Heavens, Mary!" exclaimed Eustace, straining me passionately to his breast, "your image as you appear now, all tearful and woe-begone, will ever be present to my mind during my voyage and the whole time I am away. But know you," he suddenly asked with a look of despair, as he drew back and gazed upon me,—“know you, Mary, how long my absence may last?—know you that it may be four or five years before I can return to England? Mary, are we to remain so long separated? No, no—you cannot pronounce such a death-sentence upon hope itself! Will you not promise that should

circumstances conspire to satisfy you that your sisters are well cared for and comfortably situated,—will you not promise, I ask, that you will come out to me in India?"

"Yes, I promise," was my answer—and at the instant I scarcely knew what I said.

"You promise me—Oh, you promise me this much?" cried Eustace, catching at any straw of hope—for he was at this moment deeply, deeply afflicted: yet I saw that for my sake he was exerting almost superhuman efforts to subdue a violent outburst of anguish.

But that outburst took place with both of us. The idea of a separation for long years, seemed suddenly to have come upon us both as something dreadful to contemplate: the fibres of our hearts were so closely interwoven that to have them thus cruelly severed would leave them bleeding at every pore. How therefore could we control our emotions? No, no—we could not. A torrent of words came rushing to our lips—but we found no utterance for them, and they changed into a torrent of tears. We wept—we embraced—we mingled those tears—we kissed them away from each other's cheeks—and they flowed thick and fast again—yea, thicker and faster still! Never had such convulsive sobs torn my breast since the day of my poor mother's death. I felt as if my heart must break—my brain must burst—my soul must flit away. A few minutes before I had spoken of resignation: but, Oh, it was so easy to preach—so difficult to perform! There we were, alone together upon that wild waste—far beyond the view of the dwellings on the outskirts of the town—and thus we were enabled to give full vent to our feelings without the fear of observation. That violent outburst of grief did us both good: it was like the storm that clears the atmosphere, leaving a certain serenity behind it.

In silence we walked on gazing fondly upon each other. We had a thousand, million things to say—but had not words to express them. We were, in that mood in which we dared not immediately trust ourselves to the melting influence of speech again. But at last Eustace broke this silence by saying in a low and tremulous voice, "Mary, do you think that you can be happy during my absence?"

"Happy, dear Eustace—no! But I can be resigned—and I can be hopeful. Consider, we are both young—and a few years glide away more quickly than we think that they will when looking forward from a particular point in our lives. Oh! believe me, Eustace, there are yet happy days in store for us!"

"God grant that it may be so!" he exclaimed: then in a more tranquil tone and with calmer looks he went on to say, "In two years' time, dear Mary—or in three years at the outside, your brother William and your sister Sarah will be old enough to be left to their own discretion; and then, beloved girl, you can come out to India, with Jane as your companion—and pardon me for observing that my agent in London will have received directions from me to furnish you with ample funds for the purpose. For I have arranged all my plans, dearest Mary—yes, I have arranged them all! And I will tell you what they are. I mean to live with the greatest economy—I mean to let my pay suffice, and save the allowance which my father still continues to make me, and which though small will

yet amount in a couple of years to a sum sufficient to enable us to meet all the expenses of your voyage to India with Jane, and our commencement of housekeeping. Perhaps I may gain another step in rank—in which case my means will be considerably improved. You promise me, therefore, that when circumstances permit, you will not delay coming out to join me?"—and he gazed with affectionate earnestness upon me.

"I have already promised—and I promise again, dear Eustace. Oh! believe me, it is not of my own accord that I should start obstacles to the establishment of my happiness!"

"I know it, dearest Mary—because I judge your love by my own. Would to heaven that all this were a dream, and that we stood not upon the brink of separation! But we *must* be resigned," he hastily observed, perceiving that my tears began to flow fast again. "Yes—we must be resigned; and it is my duty to exhibit a becoming fortitude."

We continued to discourse for two hours: but I need not dwell upon this sad and sorrowful chapter in my life. Those who have experienced the ineffable anguish attendant upon the prospect of a long, long separation from an object of devoted love, will not fail to comprehend what my feelings were. It appeared to me that when our last embrace should be taken, our last farewell said, and that Eustace should have disappeared from my view, my sensations would be those of a traveller in African climes who suddenly finds himself upon the extreme verge of vegetation and verdure, with naught but the blank monotony of a dreary desert stretching beyond, far as the eye can reach. And yet it was not altogether so. For after we *had* separated on that memorable day, when I *did* look across the wide desert of the future I obtained a glimpse of an oasis in the far-off horizon—small, small indeed, but yet visible and therefore prophetic of hope. This was the only slight barrier between myself and utter despair.

Oh! that separation—how can I describe it? Cannot the reader picture to himself how, when the time came for us to part and we tore ourselves away from each other, we flew back again and again into a fond and fervid embrace,—how, whilst sobbing and weeping in each other's arms, we endeavoured to murmur forth consoling words, but how our voices were lost in those sobs and suffocated by those tears,—how at one moment our looks were all despair, at another all ineffable tenderness,—and how at last, when with an almost superhuman effort on either side we did take the last embrace and say the last farewell, it seemed as if we were laying violent hands upon ourselves and parting from life by suicidal means. Oh! the agony, the anguish, the excruciation of that parting—God help me, I know not how I endured it—how I survived it: but it was the oasis of hope lying beyond the desert, which alone could have sustained me!

I remember that I rushed away almost frantic in one direction, while Eustace sped no doubt in an equal frenzy of despair towards the town. For several minutes I dared not turn my head. I felt as if the bitterness of death had passed, and that it would be an unpardonable weakness—a folly—even a crime against myself, to risk the chance of flying back again for another embrace and another fare-

well, only to be accompanied by more tortures. Therefore I sped wildly, madly, frantically, yet resolutely on; and then, unable any longer to resist the inclination to look round, I did so. Through the dimness of my tears I saw a white handkerchief wave at a distance: I waved my own in fond response—then turned again and rushed onward as before.

And now a sort of numbness of sense and feeling came gradually upon me: the wild excitement I had experienced was rapidly subsiding into the reaction of stupor; and perceiving that my limbs were failing me, I rested upon a stone resembling those placed at the heads of graves, and which stood upon the spot which I had now reached. There I endeavoured to collect my thoughts and to tranquillize them: but with a sort of shudder at the dreary dismal prospect of long separation which now lay before me, I clasped my hands together. By this action I was reminded of something. On one of my fingers Eustace had thrust a ring at the last moment of our parting; but in the hurry and confusion of thoughts that followed I had lost sight of the incident. I now pressed that ring to my lips: the circumstance that I possessed it seemed to be fraught with consolation;—it was a memorial of that love which Eustace bore me—a pledge that if heaven willed it, this mutual love of ours should one day be crowned with happiness. I took off the ring and looked inside the hoop, hoping that there might be some inscription there. Nor was I disappointed. The blended names of "EUSTACE and MARY" were delicately but plainly inscribed within the golden circle. Again and again did I press that ring to my lips: again and again did I offer up prayers to heaven to throw its protecting shield over the only hope and joy of my life, the handsome and well-beloved Eustace, in the perils of the deep and the dangers of military service in a far-off clime which he had to encounter. Then I placed that ring in my bosom; and I now felt more serene and tranquil than I could have hoped to become in so short a space.

I was moving away from the spot to retrace my steps towards Deal, from which I was now at least three miles distant, when the glance that I threw upon the stone suddenly caused it to arrest my attention. It was now for the first time, during the ten minutes I had rested there, that I noticed the circumstance of this stone being exactly like those which mark the resting-places of the dead. A cold tremor passed over me, as if with a growing instinct of the actual truth. I beheld an inscription upon the stone, and advancing a little nearer, deciphered it thus:—

On this spot, August the 25th, 1782,

Mary Rix, spinster,

Aged 23 years, was murdered by

Martin Lash, a foreigner,

Who was executed for the same.

This narrative of murder and of the criminal's punishment, was brief and simple enough: but it was too well calculated to excite horrible feelings in the mind. All was still—the sun was low in the west—the early duskiness which marks the close of a December day was stealing around me—no human being was near—not a habitation was now to be seen, for the advancing gloom had enveloped Deal

on the one side and Sandwich on the other—and there I stood alone, perhaps upon the very spot where the unfortunate victim had been slain, and whence the cry of murder had thrilled forth over the wild waste in the depth of the night which marked the tremendous tragedy. I experienced a profound horror, yet stood gazing for a few minutes upon the stone, yielding to the train of meditations to which the subject invited me. At length with a sudden and convulsive start I turned away, and retraced my steps rapidly towards the town. It was dark—though only four o'clock in the afternoon—as I entered Deal: I proceeded to Mr. Sands' house, and was joyfully welcomed by William and Jane. I had taken nothing in the shape of refreshment since an early hour in the morning: I therefore felt faint and exhausted, and gladly accepted the invitation which Mr. Sands' housekeeper gave me to stay to tea. It was with much difficulty that I could manage to assume even the appearance of cheerfulness; and I caught William looking at me two or three times with some degree of anxiety, evidently to read in the expression of my countenance if there were any weight upon my mind. After tea he sought an opportunity of asking me, aside, and very pointedly, whether I was really happy in my new situation?—and when I assured him that I was, and he saw that I spoke with emphasis and in a very strong manner, he became reassured and satisfied. I was compelled to take my leave early, as the evening was so dark and the way home was lonely. William however accompanied me a portion of the distance, and would have gone the whole way if I had let him. During our walk he assured me that his own situation was now very comfortable—that by having the new assistant he was relieved of everything bordering on an excess of work—and that the more he knew of Mr. Sands, the more he liked him; for that with all his eccentricities he possessed a very good heart. I was likewise cheered by the assurance that Jane was perfectly happy, the housekeeper being very kind to her;—and thus into the secret depths of my own sorrow did rays of consolation penetrate from all that I now heard.

Parting from William, I hastened on to the Grange, which I reached in safety. But little was the sleep which visited my eyes that night; and my pillow was moistened with my tears as I lay reflecting upon the long, long separation which I was to experience from Eustace Quentin.

In the winter season there are usually but few ships in the Downs; and at this particular time there was only one (besides the guard-ship) which had three masts. This had been pointed out to me by Eustace as the one that was to bear him to India. The moment it was light I rose from my couch and looked towards the sea. There the ship lay,—the ship which contained him who was all in all to me—the being in whom the hopes of my life were centred. Oh! to reflect that but a few frail planks separated this loved one from death in the engulfing deep!—it was a thought full of a stupendous horror. But then I set myself to reflect how many, many thousands of vessels there were floating upon the seas of the world, and how comparatively few were the shipwrecks that took place. In short, I conjured up every argument that reason or imagination could suggest in order to console myself withal; and I

likewise pressed to my lips that ring which seemed in itself the emblem of hope as it assuredly was the pledge of love. On the following day, when the sun rose, I again looked towards the sea: the ship was still there—but the sails were fluttering from its yards, and I knew that it was about to weigh anchor. The wind was favourable—the weather was propitious—and I buoyed myself up with the idea that heaven smiled thus brightly, even in that winter season, to convey to my heart the assurance that there was a supervising hand which would indeed throw a protecting shield over him who was so dear to me. I had faith—and faith begets hope. Again I kissed the ring; again I thought within myself that we were both still very young, and that many years of happiness might recompense us for present separation and sorrow; and I did my best to summon all my fortitude to my aid. I beheld the white sails gradually stretching over the three tall tapering masts—I saw the ship slowly moving away from its anchorage—I watched it as it passed majestically along “like a thing of life,” as the poet has so beautifully described it, over the waters—and during the hour that it still remained in sight, were my eyes rivetted upon it from the nursery-window. At length it disappeared behind the projecting cliffs below Walmer Castle; then, as it was thus intercepted from my view, I did indeed experience a poignant and a cruel revulsion of feelings; and long as well as plentifully did I weep.

CHAPTER XC.

THE GOSSIPS.

It was about a week after the departure of Eustace Quentin; and on another fine frosty sunlit morning did Mrs. Kingston bid me accompany her for a walk, the pony being prepared for little Kate. I could not help noticing that my mistress had frequently sought my society since the previous ramble we had taken together. She would often come up into the nursery and converse with me, invariably turning the discourse upon books and intellectual topics, as if it were a pleasing change for her to touch upon such matters. On the present occasion, no sooner had we left the Grange and begun to pass down the gravel-walk towards the park-gate, when Mrs. Kingston entered upon the topics which now seemed almost as much favoured by her as the subject of horseflesh itself; and at length she said, “I don’t know how it is, Mary, but I seem to have experienced a new pleasure in finding some one to talk to in this intellectual strain.”

“Having read much, ma’am, in the earlier part of your life,” I answered, “you naturally love these topics from former associations.”

“I used to be extremely fond of reading once,” she replied: “but, as you may suppose, of late years I have read but little. All my recreations have been out of doors; and I now love them so dearly that they have become necessary as it were to my existence. By the bye,” she suddenly added, “there is a young lady—a cousin of mine—coming to stay with us in a few days, who will be delighted to pass hours with you in the nursery, talking in the same strain in which we have been conversing. She is a very amiable and very agreeable girl, about

your own age. But she is much more romantic—much more fond of poetry than you are: her mind is not so practical nor so sedate. Not that she is volatile or giddy: but high-spirited, enthusiastic, and perhaps somewhat visionary. I do not exactly know what her ideas of happiness in this world may be: but I fear that they are rather based upon dreams than on an experience of realities.”

Mrs. Kingston paused, and seemed to meditate with a growing seriousness, as if there were something in connexion with the young lady of whom she had been speaking that caused her either apprehension and uneasiness, or at all events afforded scope for this grave meditation.

“Laura Maitland—for that is my cousin’s name,” she proceeded to observe, “is an orphan and an heiress. She has hitherto been living with an old aunt of ours at Brighton: but circumstances have arisen to render her uncomfortable beneath this aunt’s roof, and so she is coming to take up her abode with us. Mrs. Maitland—for it is an aunt on our father’s side—is certainly not the most agreeable old lady in existence: she is fond of playing the tyrant, and thinks that young people ought to have no will of their own. Now it happens that Laura thinks quite otherwise; and I am inclined to agree with her. As a matter of course, there are certain points upon which young persons must defer to the opinions of their elder and more experienced relatives: but in affairs of the heart, there should at least be no attempt at coercion. To tell you the truth, Mary—for since I have already told you so much, I may as well explain on unto the end,—there is an old General officer, as rich as Cræsus, as ugly as Sin, and covered as much with infirmities as glories, who is a suitor for Laura’s hand; and Mrs. Maitland is deeply indignant because my young cousin will not sacrifice herself to this individual, who has one foot in the grave and is old enough to be her grandfather. Moreover, Laura thinks that in respect to marriage she is the best judge of her own happiness. And now you are quite prepared to hear that she is inclined to favour the claims of another suitor. This is the case. The consequence is that for the last two or three months there have been incessant disputes between herself and her aunt, till things have reached a point no longer tolerable for poor Laura. She has determined to quit her aunt’s abode; and no power on earth can dissuade her from it. Therefore, as she has no other female relative except myself so circumstanced as to be able to receive her, I have written to invite her to the Grange. I dare say that I shall draw upon myself Aunt Maitland’s displeasure for what she will call encouraging Laura in her rebellious spirit: but what am I to do? Laura *does* possess a proud spirit, but a generous disposition; and it were a pity to see this spirit altogether broken by coercive sternness. I must therefore give her a home: and what is more,” added Mrs. Kingston, “I assuredly shall not undertake to persuade her to throw herself away upon the old General.”

While this conversation was progressing, we had issued from the park, and happened to be pursuing the very same road which, leading towards Walmer, was the scene of our meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Mildmay on the former occasion of our ramble there. We had almost reached the very spot where that encounter took place, when Mrs. Kingston sud-

denly gave vent to an ejaculation of annoyance, as she beheld two elderly ladies approaching at a pace that seemed somewhat quick and excited for a couple of their years.

"Oh, the dreadful gossips!" said Mrs. Kingston hastily to me. "Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins! And depend upon it they are on their way to the Grange."

"This time, ma'am," I said with a somewhat sly look, "John is determined to proclaim the cholera at the house."

"Anything to get rid of these odious creatures if they persist in going home to the Grange! It is a dreadful effort of hypocrisy to find oneself compelled to be civil to them."

Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins now drew near to us. Both were short, and stout, and red-faced; and both were dressed in what may be termed a frumpish style. They looked exactly what they were—gossiping old ladies, with small incomes, all their ideas narrowed to the sphere of their village-scandal, and ready to avenge upon the young and the beautiful their own mortified sense of the fact that they themselves were old and ugly. But as they drew close, I observed that they both wore a strange expression of countenance—both looked stern, prim, and mysterious, and seemed as if they were bent upon some object beyond the mere paying of a morning call or the enjoyment of a gossip. Mrs. Kingston likewise noticed this strangeness of their looks; for she immediately whispered aside to me, "There is evidently something wrong with these ladies, Mary."

"How does Mrs. Kingston do?" asked Mrs. French, with a proud toss of her head, as if she meant to shake off the black silk coal-scuttle-shaped bonnet that encumbered it.

"Yes—how *does* Mrs. Kingston find herself?" exclaimed Mrs. Popkins, with a still mightier toss of the head and a still more disdainful air.

"I am very well, I thank you," answered my mistress; and as neither of the elderly ladies offered a hand, she remained equally reserved, but evidently wondering what could be the meaning of this behaviour on their part.

"My dear friend Mrs. Popkins and myself," resumed Mrs. French, with all the importance of a spokeswoman, "were on our way to the Grange to see *you*, Mrs. Kingston—and in short, to demand certain explanations. So, with your permission, when you have finished your walk, we will accompany you home."

"If you have any explanations to demand of me, ladies," replied Mrs. Kingston with a calm cold dignity blended with an easy indifference, "you may as well speak your minds at once, and I will answer you."

"We are not accustomed to talk in the presence of servants," said Mrs. French, with another toss of her head and a scornful look towards me. "We don't make our servants our companions. If they do happen to go out with us they walk behind at a respectful distance—hem!"

"Oh, yes!" chimed in Mrs. Popkins: "we know what the sluts are and how they tittle-tattle. For my part I hate a gossip!"—and now she threw a furious look upon Mrs. Kingston.

"And I abominate a scandal-monger," added Mrs. French, likewise concentrating all the daggers of her eyes upon my mistress.

"I am awaiting your questions," said Mrs. Kingston with the most lady-like calmness. "As for your observations relative to servants, and your manifest allusions to this young person here, I treat them as they deserve."

"And pray how do you treat them?" demanded Mrs. French, her face becoming purple inside the coal-scuttle bonnet.

"Yes, how do you treat them?" exclaimed Mrs. Popkins, whose large round face, always very red, was now of so deep a dye that a peony was of delicate hue in comparison.

"I treat them," responded Mrs. Kingston, unmoved and completely dignified, "with contempt."

"Oh! it's all very well to talk in this manner," screamed forth Mrs. French, trembling with rage: "and you think perhaps that because you're the wife of Squire Kingston of the Grange, you can be as proud as you please: but depend upon it such pride will have a fall."

"Ladies," said my mistress, just as Mrs. Popkins was about to take up the tale, "you will be kind enough to tell me which way lies your path, so that I may pursue mine in the contrary direction?"

"Not before we have had explanations," said Mrs. French.

"And apologies too," added Mrs. Popkins.

"And contradictions as well."

"And all in writing, too."

"As you are evidently labouring under some grievous error," said Mrs. Kingston, "and as I do not wish to be misunderstood even by persons whose opinions generally I should regard with the utmost indifference, I will wait to hear the points upon which you seek explanations."

"Oh! I dare say you know all about it," cried Mrs. French, with an hysterical giggle that was meant to express scorn, but was really full of rage: "I suppose you won't contradict having told Mrs. Mildmay that Mrs. Popkins had told you I was the greatest gossip and story-teller in all the village?"

"And that Mrs. French had told you," instantaneously added Mrs. Popkins, "that I drank tea at four-and-six the pound, but made it as strong as brandy by putting brandy in it?"

"Oh! it's all come out—you needn't attempt to deny it!" exclaimed Mrs. French. "The whole village is up in arms. Everything you said is known. Mr. Styles and Miss Marigold both see who their secret enemy has been. The Perkinses say that they shall never ask *you* to honour with your presence the two little rooms in which they cram sixty people and give them weak negus."

"And Mr. Perkins declares," cried Mrs. Popkins, "that he will bring an action for defamation against you, for having said that his daughter Charlotte was compelled to leave home for a few months for a particular reason—whereas she has not gone and is not going at all."

"And the Richardsons vow and protest that they will have vengeance upon you for having said they hadn't paid their last Christmas bills."

"And the Kitsons are furious at what you have said of their son Reginald, calling him a scamp, and a spendthrift, and nothing but an arrant swindler."

"And the Griggses, who have come back from a

trip to London, are thoroughly enraged to find that you said they had run away without paying their bills."

"And Sir Tobias Skeffington, who had merely gone to settle his affairs before he married Ellen Kitson, vows that he will call the Squire out for what you have said of him—that he was always drunk, and that it would be a blessed thing for Ellen if she didn't marry him at all."

"And the Lovells protest that after your saying you have already too many queer acquaintances which disgrace you, and you shall not therefore call upon them, they will never enter the same house where you or your's have darkened the doorway."

These accusations against Mrs. Kingston were poured forth with such exceeding volubility by the two elderly ladies, that my mistress could not have immediately replied to them even if she had been in a hurry to do so. They resembled consecutive discharges of artillery rapidly shot forth; and the longer Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins went on speaking, the more excited did they appear to become—so that it was indeed a matter of surprise they did not drop down in apoplexy, for they were both purple in the face and the veins were swollen upon their foreheads almost to bursting. Indeed, they would no doubt have gone on much longer and with even increased volubility, had it not been that their breath failed them. Then they stood panting and quivering with excitement, and with the perspiration pouring down their countenances, gazing upon Mrs. Kingston with looks that seemed to defy her to give either direct denial or satisfactory explanation in response to all the charges they had adduced.

"Ladies," said my mistress, perceiving that they were now both silent from exhaustion, "I have but one word to say—which is to deny emphatically and indignantly that I am the authoress of one single averment which has fallen from your lips."

Both Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins seemed to be taken quite aback by the boldness of a repudiation which they evidently had not expected. No doubt they had fancied that Mrs. Kingston would be overwhelmed with confusion—become terribly alarmed—entreat pardon in the most abject manner—and beg and implore them both to go and make her peace with Mr. Styles and Miss Marigold, the Griggses, the Perkinses, the Richardsons, the Kitsons, and the Lovells. But when they perceived that my mistress treated the matter in that calmly dignified way, and denied the averments with the confidence and assurance of truthfulness, their suspicions were very speedily turned into another channel.

"My dear Mrs. Kingston, pray for heaven's sake forgive me!" cried Mrs. French, now seizing my mistress's hand and wringing it with effusion. "I am quite in despair—I would not have offended you for the world—"

"And I am so distressed," exclaimed Mrs. Popkins, at the same time taking Mrs. Kingston's other hand, "that I really can scarcely look you in the face. To think we should have treated you thus! But I understand it all now!"

"Yes—that odious Mrs. Mildmay," interrupted Mrs. French, "she is the authoress of it all."

"She has been the round of the village telling

such things—and now she's gone into Deal to-day to retail all the self-same things there. But do tell us, my dear Mrs. Kingston—for I begin to suspect that Mrs. Mildmay has been drawing the long bow in other respects—"

"Oh! she's a horrible story-teller," cried Mrs. French. "But is it true that you gave a select party three or four weeks ago to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dean and Archdeacon, and a lot of other dignitaries, and that of all your friends and acquaintances the Mildmays were alone asked?"

"I can very safely give you both the assurance that no such party took place at all!"—and Mrs. Kingston could not entirely repress a good-humoured smile as she recollected John's ingenuity on the occasion. "Indeed, I may add that we have not the honour of his Grace of Canterbury's acquaintance."

"Did you ever?" exclaimed Mrs. French, with a look of surprised indignation at Mrs. Popkins.

"No, I never!" answered Mrs. Popkins, with a look of indignant surprise at Mrs. French.

"You see, ladies," said Mrs. Kingston, "that you have been sadly misled."

"Misled indeed!" cried Mrs. French. "Why, that impudent Mrs. Mildmay has done nothing for the last three weeks but go all round the village bragging and boasting how she and her old fool of a husband were specially invited to the Grange to meet the Archbishop and his clergy—how the Archbishop patted Mr. Mildmay on the back and told him his name was known in the highest circles—and how, as he shook hands with Mrs. Mildmay at parting, he promised to come and take a friendly cup of tea with her at the earliest opportunity. She has done nothing in fact but hurl the Archbishop at the heads of all her acquaintances, till we have been sick of the Archbishop."

"Ah! if that was all, it wouldn't be so bad," said Mrs. Popkins, shaking her head ominously: "but she has been spreading all those reports of what you, my dear Mrs. Kingston, had said to her—or as she represented you to have said, on that day. She says that you had a fall from your favourite horse, which had given you such a distaste for riding that you meant to leave it off; and that as you and the Squire were entirely one, he meant to follow your example and leave off riding too, so that the whole stud was to be brought to the hammer. But this odious Mrs. Mildmay mysteriously shakes her head and whispers that she can see through it all—that things are queer up at the Grange—that there must be retrenchment and all that sort of thing—and that the fall from the horse was but an excuse for getting rid of the stud."

"The whole affair is too ludicrous," said Mrs. Kingston, "to treat with indignation."

"Oh! but that's not all," ejaculated Mrs. Popkins. "Mrs. Mildmay said that you had begged of her to send up Mrs. Simcox with riding-hats for the children, and bonnets, and so on, but that as you wanted credit and Mrs. Simcox thought that things were queer she wouldn't give it."

"I will condescend to explain this point," said Mrs. Kingston. "Mrs. Mildmay of her own accord, and most impudently as I thought, sent Mrs. Simcox up to the Grange with two of her young women all laden with bandboxes: but as I required nothing, and did not choose to have things thus forced upon me, I declined to see Mrs. Simcox, sending

her a civil message however to the effect that I was sorry she should have been led by misrepresentations to give herself so much unnecessary trouble. I deal with Mrs. Pritchard, and shall continue to do so."

"Then it isn't true that the Pritchards refused you any farther credit," said Mrs. Popkins; "as Mrs. Mildmay said she had done, and that was the reason of your wanting to deal with Mrs. Sincox? But I see that Mrs. Mildmay has been telling some dreadful fibs——"

"Yes, even to the fall from the favourite horse," answered Mrs. Kingston: "for I have been riding regularly since, and hope to continue to do so in spite of Mrs. Mildmay."

"Well, my dear friend," resumed Mrs. Popkins, "I do hope that you will forgive us. You see it was natural for us to be offended and to seek explanations, after hearing such things about ourselves."

"I am sure I most sincerely and most humbly beg your pardon," hastily interjected Mrs. French. "I wouldn't for the world have done or said anything to provoke: but it's all through that Mrs. Mildmay. For my part, I shall cut her."

"She shall never enter my door again," added Mrs. Popkins. "I always thought she had an evil tongue—and now I have found it out. There's nothing I hate so much as a gossip. But really, to show us that you are not offended, you must let us accompany you to the Grange."

"Yes—for I feel quite faint and ill after this excitement," said Mrs. French.

Mrs. Kingston saw that there was no help for it: so we turned round, and the whole party proceeded along the road towards the Grange. Mrs. Popkins and Mrs. French rattled away in turn upon all possible subjects regarding their neighbours, friends, and acquaintances: but if these were only lacerated with severity, the unfortunate Mildmay's were literally torn into shreds and patches. Mrs. Kingston took no part in the discourse—did not appear even to listen to it—but walked on in silence, and with a certain gravity of look, as if she studied to show her displeasure as much as she could consistently with the rules of courtesy. At length the two old ladies became so annoying with their backbiting, their scandal-mongering, and their mischievous gossiping, that Mrs. Kingston appeared actually distressed: the infliction was evidently growing intolerable; and she looked at me as much as to say, "What in the name of heaven am I to do?" Then pretending to lean over the pony in order to adjust little Kate's clothing, she seized the opportunity to whisper to me as I walked on the other side of the animal, "Hasten onward and tell the Squire what a blessing is in store for him."

We had by this time reached the park-gate, and I hurried in advance to deliver the message. I foresaw another ludicrous scene arising from the exercise of John's inventive faculties; and I could not help being sorry that my mistress should have recourse to such means to get rid of her unwelcome guests rather than tell them boldly and frankly at once that she could not receive them. But then, after all, it was not Mrs. Kingston's fault: it was the fault of that society to which she belonged, and the conventionalisms of which are nothing but one mass of hypocrisies, duplicities, and deceptions. Yes:

for such is genteel society!—genteel to cause your servants to utter falsehoods because the master or mistress have not the moral courage to tell truths, —genteel to salute persons as your very dear friends, for whom you entertain a cordial hatred or a very profound contempt,—genteel to make the most anxious inquiries after the healths of those whose deaths would not excite a single regret on the part of the inquirers,—genteel to make morning-calls with the appearance of a friendly spirit, but in reality to tear to pieces all friends who are absent, —genteel to fill one's house with a crowd of guests half of whom are only just known by name, and to the other half of whom you would not give a guinea to save them all from the workhouse,—genteel to be regular in attendance at church, to join in prayer against "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness," but to envy this one's bonnet, hate another for being better dressed than yourself, feel bitter malice against a third for her eclipsing beauty, and experience utter uncharitableness towards all around—to put a guinea into the plate after the charity-sermon for some sectarian school, and to refuse a penny to the shivering starving beggar who holds his battered hat outside the church portico. And all this is the gentility of society!

But let me continue! I reached the Grange a good ten minutes in advance of Mrs. Kingston and the two old gossips, and at once inquired where my master was. The hall-porter pointed to the dining-room; and there I found Mr. Kingston reading a Sporting Magazine and waiting for his wife to come home to lunch. My message was speedily delivered—whereupon Mr. Kingston, starting up from his seat as if suddenly galvanized, rushed to the window, and beholding the two old frumps approaching, shouted out, "No, by heaven, I would sooner go to the deuce at once" (I think however he made use of some more extreme term) "than have these two wretches here. John, John! ring the bell, Mary, and tell that rascal John to come—Oh, here he is!" And sure enough, John, who had been lounging as usual in the hall, heard himself summoned and made his appearance accordingly. "John," continued the Squire, "Mrs. Popkins and Mrs. French are coming."

"I saw them, sir."

"But they mustn't come in, John."

"Very good, sir. I will keep them out."

"Yes—even if you barricade the doors."

"Leave it to me, sir!"—and John quitted the room.

I followed him for the purpose of taking little Kate from the pony; and in a few minutes another ludicrous scene, as I had anticipated, took place. Mrs. Kingston with the two village gossips came advancing up the steps,—when John, throwing as much dismay into his countenance as if he were a tragic actor having at least a dozen murders to reveal, said to Mrs. Kingston, "Oh! ma'am, what a visitation!"—and he pressed both his hands violently against his stomach. "I do really believe I shall have it myself."

"Gracious goodness!" cried Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins in the same breath, and both alike catching the infection of John's dismay. "What in heaven's name is the matter?"

"Oh, ladies! it's horrible, horrible!" cried John.

"Am I turning blue?"

"Blue!" echoed Mrs. French. "Is the man tipsy?"

"Or mad?" asked Mrs. Popkins.

"Or both?" suggested Mrs. French.

"But what is it, John?" inquired Mrs. Kingston, seeing that she must say something.

"A dreadful disease, ma'am, has entered the house—Luke is stretched upon his back—Dick upon his stomach—and Harry upon his side. It's horrible, ma'am! I begin to have the spasms myself:"—and he made hideous contortions as he spoke.

Mrs. Kingston fairly burst out laughing and turned aside: but Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins were so stupefied with mingled terror and amazement that they neither heard the laugh nor perceived the movement.

"There! There! it has seized him now!" vociferated John, pointing to the old porter.

Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins instinctively rushed into the hall, and flung their eyes in the direction pointed out by John. There they beheld the porter, Mr. Hutton, literally writhing in his chair and purple in the face,—throwing himself with his stomach over the leathern-covered arm of the huge concern, and apparently in the utmost agony.

"Good heaven, what is it?" exclaimed Mrs. French.

"The disease, ma'am—what is it? Why, the cholera morbus!" replied John.

There were a couple of frantic shrieks, and then down the steps rushed the two ancient dames as if mad dogs were at their heels. It was quite a wonder that they did not tumble and roll down to the bottom. Not the slightest notice did they pause to take of Mrs. Kingston or the child; but away they sped as if they were running a race with each other down the gravel-walk.

"Two to one on Mrs. Popkins," said John coolly, as he surveyed them from the threshold.

"Oh, John, John! you will be the death of me," exclaimed the hall-porter: for he had indeed been writhing in his chair, and he was indeed purple in the face—but it was only with the efforts he was making to keep down an explosion of uproarious laughter.

Mrs. Kingston was herself laughing till the tears ran down her cheeks; so that she was unable to say a word, even if inclined to make any comment upon the proceeding. The Squire came out in such a state of merriment that it amounted to convulsions and excruciations: but all the while John continued to survey with the utmost imperturbability the two old ladies who were scudding along at a break-neck pace.

On the following day, Mrs. Kingston came up into the nursery; and handing me a letter, said with a smile, "As you were a witness, Mary, of the ludicrous scene a few weeks ago with Mrs. Mildmay, perhaps you will like to see the result of it. Read those letters."

I looked at the address on the envelope, and saw that it was directed to Mrs. Kingston. I opened it, and found two letters, the contents of which, as well as I can now recollect them, ran somewhat in the following strain:—

"Madam,

"I send you the enclosed that you may see I am no longer the dupe of the stories told by your villainous

footman. When falsehoods of this kind are told they often humiliate both parties—those on whose side they are told, and those to whom they are told. Such is the case in the present instance. You and your husband are humiliated by being thus detected in an endeavour to make yourselves out so proud and great that you are visited by archbishops; and on the other hand, I and Mr. Mildmay are humiliated by having acted in full confidence of the truth of the representations made us. I have no more to say than that I am, madam,

"Yours indignantly,

"DOROTHEA MILDMAI."

"Lambeth Palace, Dec. 19th, 1830.

"Sir,

"I am commanded by his Grace the Archbishop to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 15th, and to express his Grace's surprise at its contents, inasmuch as his Grace has not visited Walmer for three years past—has not the honour of being acquainted with any persons of the name of Kingston—and is ignorant where Kingston Grange is: his Grace therefore was never a guest within those walls. The Archbishop has never mentioned to any one that he is acquainted with the name of Mildmay or that he has heard it spoken of in the higher circles: he therefore never made any promise to pay yourself and Mrs. Mildmay a friendly visit at your house. His Grace can only suppose that yourself and Mrs. Mildmay have been deceived by some mischievously or waggishly disposed persons; and he counsels you to be less credulous in future.

"I remain, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"HERBERT FITZHERBERT,

"(Private Secretary).

"Philip Mildmay, Esq."

"What would you advise me to do, Mary," asked Mrs. Kingston as I returned her those letters, "about all the falsehoods that Mrs. Mildmay has spread through the village in reference to the Richardsons, the Griggses, the Kitsons, and so on?"

"Since you are kind enough to ask my advice," I replied, "I will tell you, ma'am, what I would do: I would suffer the evil to work its own cure. Depend upon it that the two ladies whom John's ingenuity chased away from the Grange yesterday, will take very good care to make all their friends and acquaintances aware that Mrs. Mildmay herself was the authoress of those tales. Finding that you are indifferent upon the matter and will not plunge into a war of words, they will be only too glad to set the hornet's nest of all these defamed families upon Mrs. Mildmay. I should therefore, ma'am, recommend you to take no further notice of the matter."

"That is just the course I thought of adopting," said Mrs. Kingston; "and I am very much mistaken if with two such active persons as Mrs. Popkins and Mrs. French to get up a crusade against her, Mrs. Mildmay does not stand a good chance of being drummed out of the village."

"Would you pardon my boldness, ma'am, if I venture to make a remark?" I said, after a pause, and with some little degree of hesitation.

"I know well what you are going to say, Mary: but go on—I shall not be offended."

"I would most respectfully represent, ma'am, the dangers and inconveniences attendant upon these excuses which John is so often commanded to make. I am well aware that in the higher walks of society these things are practised: it was constantly done at Harlesdon House—and in short, at almost every place that I have been in. But excuse me, ma'am

"Walmer, Dec. 20th, 1830.



—depend upon my word, it spoils the servants, and must at times lead masters and mistresses themselves into awkward dilemmas and embarrassments.”

“Oh! but it is impossible to act otherwise,” exclaimed Mrs. Kingston. “I see the force of all you advance: but can you suggest a better plan? Must we throw open our doors to such odious characters as the Popkins, the Frenches, and the Mildmays of Walmer—or such an inveterate old dinner-hunter as Admiral Bowline?”

At this moment the Squire’s voice was heard calling loudly for his wife.

“Lizzy, old girl—Lizzy! where the deuce are you?”

Mrs. Kingston opened the nursery-door and called to her husband. The Squire came bounding up the stairs, and rushing into the room, exclaimed, “I say, old girl, did you tell John he might have a holiday to-day? Of course if you did it’s all

right enough: but it’s something so unusual for you to do, that I didn’t believe the scoundrel when he told me that you had.”

“My dear Tom,” answered his wife in surprise, “you know very well that the men-servants never even apply to me on such occasions.”

“Then it’s all a lie on John’s part,” exclaimed the Squire. “Now, what do you think? That poor Pluto was by accident locked up all night in the barn with nothing to eat and drink: but when I ask John just now if he has taken him to the water, he says ‘Yes’ as cool as possible. Then there’s all those letters I took the trouble to sit down and write a week ago about different things; and not having an answer to a single one, I ask John if he is sure he took them to the post, and he swears he did. But just now Hutton found them all crammed under the cushion of his chair in the hall. Wait a moment!” continued the Squire, as his wife was about to make an observation expressive of her

anger: "that's not all. There's Springfield the harness-maker just sent up a bill for thirty-eight pounds, and this very bill I gave John the money to pay two months back. I ask him about it now, and he stands me out to my face that I never gave him the money at all—that I told him I should, but that I did not. Why, I have looked in the cheque-book and there's the entry proving the fact. You know I always pay the bills the moment they come in. And then, to make things worse, I find John dressed out like any gentleman, in plain clothes, walking coolly off for a holiday. I ask him who gave him permission, and he boldly says that *you* did as a reward for his cleverness in getting rid of the two old gossips yesterday."

Mrs. Kingston looked at me as much as to say that I was right, and that if John had been telling a pack of stories it was not without some degree of encouragement.

"And what have you done?" she asked, turning her eyes again upon her husband.

"Done, my dear Liz? what could I do? I let the fellow go. Of course I wouldn't interfere with any permission you might have given; but when he was gone I thought to myself that it was deuced odd, and as he had told so many other crammers, it struck me that this was one like the rest. So I determined to ask you."

"It is strange enough," said Mrs. Kingston, "that Mary was talking to me in a very prudent and sensible way at the time your voice was heard, Tom. She was speaking about making one's servants tell stories for them; and I really do begin to think that we must turn over a new leaf. It would almost be better to risk the chance of giving offence by having it said 'that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston are too much engaged to receive company to-day,' than by the 'not at home' system."

"Well, my dear, you are an uncommon clever woman," said Mr. Kingston; "and whatever you suggest I am sure will prove agreeable to me. But even suppose that we look over all the other crammers that John has been telling about the dog, and the letters, and the holiday, what are we to do in this money business of Springfield's?"

"I know what Mary will say," observed Mrs. Kingston, looking at me: "she will tell us that falsehoods lead to worse things, and that as we have encouraged John to tell the former we ought to be merciful in respect to what he may have done in the latter sense. Is it not so, Mary?"

"As you appeal to me, ma'am," I answered, "I must frankly confess that those are my views."

"Yes—but a lie and a theft are two rather different things," exclaimed the Squire. "I don't like this business a bit. Besides," he suddenly ejaculated, as another thought seemed to strike him, "how do we know where it has stopped? Since John has acted in a sort of confidential way and served as valet as well as footman, I have entrusted him with several sums to pay. I tell you what I will do—I will just mount the bay horse and ride down into Deal to make a few inquiries of the tradesmen. Hang me if it didn't strike me just now that John had got one of my own shirts on, and that even before my very face he coolly wiped his nose with one of my own handkerchiefs."

"Well, Tom, to tell you the truth," said Mrs. Kingston, now recollecting something, "Mrs.

Taylor told me the other day how unaccountably short you ran of linen, and how many of your things seemed to have disappeared. She spoke to the laundrymaid, who assured her she always returned the list correct according to the things given out to wash."

"I begin to smell more rats than one," exclaimed the Squire. "So I will be off into Deal. I suppose you won't come with me, Liz, on such an expedition as this?"

"No, thank you, old boy. From the letter we had from Laura Maitland this morning, I should think it is very likely she may come in the course of the day: so I had better remain at home to receive her."

"All right," said the Squire; and chucking his wife under the chin with good-humoured playfulness, he issued from the room, singing a jolly song as he went down the stairs, just as if nothing at all unpleasant had occurred.

CHAPTER XCI.

JOHN THE FOOTMAN.

IN the afternoon, when the Squire had returned from Deal, Mrs. Kingston came up again into the nursery, where I was seated alone at the time with little Kate; and I immediately saw that my kind mistress looked much distressed. I therefore concluded that Mr. Kingston had found matters at least as bad as he had expected, or even worse. This latter surmise turned out to be the true one. Several bills, for which John had received the money, remained unpaid; and it appeared that something which the Squire heard while pursuing his inquiries, had led him to pay a visit to the pawnbroker's. There he found that numerous articles from his wardrobe and drawers had been pledged—coats, boots, waistcoats, shirts, gold studs, a couple of rings, and several other things which I do not now recollect. They had been pawned in a false name, but by a person exactly answering the description of the head footman. The amount of unpaid bills was about one hundred and fifty pounds; and the articles just alluded to were pledged for thirty more. What John had done with the money, or into what possible extravagances he could have been led, living as he did in the country-seclusion of the Grange, it was difficult to conjecture. There, however, was the truth, as patent as it was painful, that the money had been had and self-appropriated by the offender.

"This is altogether a very distressing case, Mary," said Mrs. Kingston; "and it has grieved both the Squire and me very much. We have however made up our minds to the course we shall pursue. We feel that we have been to a certain extent culpable in encouraging this man in the utterance of falsehoods; and that we have even made them a subject of merriment. We look upon ourselves as having perhaps taught him those arts of duplicity and deceit which have at length turned against ourselves. We therefore propose to question him when he comes back presently, as to the extent of his misdeeds—ascertain if possible for what purpose he has required all this money—and dismiss him at once, but with such wages as may be due to him. For if

he have spent all the money, and if he be penniless, we will not turn him adrift in that state upon the wide world."

As Mrs. Kingston evidently awaited a reply, and even paid me the compliment of letting me know that she was consulting me, and not merely telling me all these things as a simple matter of conversation, I ventured to express my cordial approval of the course which Mr. Kingston and herself intended to adopt. While we were still discoursing, the sounds of a carriage advancing up the park reached our ears; and Mrs. Kingston, exclaiming, "This must be my cousin Laura," hastened from the room.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when a message was brought up to me that if little Kate was not yet in bed I was to take her down stairs to the drawing-room. The child was wide awake, and I had not begun to undress her. I accordingly descended to the drawing-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, with their three eldest children and Miss Maitland, were seated round a blazing Christmas-fire.

"Is this my sweet little Kate?" said Miss Maitland, rising from her chair and advancing to take the child up in her arms. "How she has grown—and how improved! I really should have hardly known her. But then it is nearly a year since I was last at the Grange."

"You can come down and fetch Kate again in about half-an-hour," said Mrs. Kingston to me. I accordingly retired; but as I issued from the drawing-room, I heard a curious kind of singing down in the hall; and I speedily recognized the voice of John the footman, who was chaunting a bacchanalian song in the thick hiccupping broken voice of intoxication.

"Now, John, do go up to your bed, there's a good fellow," I heard the hall-porter say in a coaxing tone; but not waiting to hear any more, I retraced my way to the nursery.

Miss Maitland, whom I had full opportunity of seeing while I was in the drawing-room, was a young lady of very striking appearance. She was tall and finely made—upright as a dart—and with a gait alike commanding and graceful. She had auburn hair, of that precious hue which looks of golden brightness where the light falls upon it, but of velvet darkness where the shade remains. Her complexion was perfectly dazzling in its fairness and its transparency; and there was but little bloom upon the cheeks, so that she seemed to be characterized by that classic pallor which in itself is animation, without aught approaching a sickly or insipid appearance. Her eyes were large and of the deepest blue; her profile was faultless; her teeth of pearly whiteness. Her figure, modelled upon a somewhat large scale, was however of the most exact symmetry of proportions. At a single glance her disposition could be read in her looks, just as Mrs. Kingston had described it, and as I afterwards found it to be. High-spirited and impetuous when at all thwarted or provoked, she was nevertheless in her ordinary moods amiable and invariably generous-hearted: confiding and frank, she was the last to suspect sinister motives in others. She was evidently a being who could love fondly and passionately where her affections were centred, and who was equally susceptible of warm friendships. But she

was not a young woman to be coerced or intimidated: on the contrary, any attempt at such tyranny would only be too well calculated to drive her into the opposite extreme, and thus even lead her to something rash and precipitate in order that she might have the triumph and satisfaction of asserting her own will. Such was Laura Maitland; and the impression which she made upon me the very first moment I beheld her, was favourable.

At the expiration of the half-hour I descended to the drawing-room again. The three "young ladies"—as Harriet, Jessy, and Maria, were invariably denominated at the Grange—were seated in their chairs as quiet and sedate as grown-up women, and actually looking down with the same half-affectionate, half-patronizing air upon little Kate who was rolling upon the hearth-rug.

"Now, my dear child," said Miss Maria, who, as the reader will remember, was only eight years old, "if you don't take care you will hurt yourself in a moment—and then you will be crying."

"Oh! let her romp," said Jessy, who was just turned of ten: "it does one good to see children happy and enjoy themselves."

"Ah! we were like her once," observed Harriet, the eldest, who was twelve: "but it was a long time ago."

"Why, my dear little cousins," exclaimed Laura Maitland, her merry laugh ringing musically through the room, "one would think to hear you talk, that the youngest of you would never see twenty-five again."

"Hush, my dear!" said Mrs. Kingston aside to Laura: "don't make them think that they are to be treated as children—or else they will lose all their steady and grown-up habits. I like to see them thus: they are more companionable."

"Shall I take Miss Kate, ma'am?" I asked.

"Oh! leave her for a few minutes," cried the Squire, who was doatingly fond of the children. "I like to see the little puss rolling about on the rug; and she seems to enjoy herself so. You can wait a minute or two, Mary. But you needn't stand there: go and sit down. There's some wine on that table yonder: help yourself to a glass—it will do you good. By the bye, Mary, you have been with us now several weeks, and I haven't seen you once on horseback. Miss Maitland has been asking a great many questions about you—"

At this moment the door opened; and John, dressed in the plain clothes in which he had been out all day, made his appearance. He was evidently endeavouring to seem sober, and to struggle against the overpowering effects of the liquor he had been taking. He supported himself in the doorway, but swayed to and fro, and had a very vacant gaze, though doing the best he could to look uncommonly wise and knowing.

"Why, John," said Mr. Kingston, at once perceiving his condition,—"John, you're drunk."

"No, sir—Oh, no!" was the footman's reply, with as many hiccups and syllables. "Only indisposed, sir."

"Indisposed? Yes, with liquor."

"I've had nothing, sir, but one half-pint of ale all day. I was told you wanted me, sir."

"Yes: but I will speak to you to-morrow morning. Get up to bed."

"I hope nothing is wrong, sir," said the man,

evidently in suspense, and being sufficiently conscious to wish to have his apprehensions cleared up. "I suppose, sir, missus doesn't remember having given me leave to take a holiday——"

"You had better go to bed, John; and I will speak to you in the morning."

The footman still lingered, with evidently reluctance to take his departure: but Mr. Kingston now spoke in a more peremptory tone, and he dared no longer disobey. Staggering out of the room, he could with difficulty close the door behind himself. I waited a few minutes longer; and then took little Kate up to the nursery.

On the following morning, after breakfast, Miss Maitland came up, ostensibly to see the child, but in reality, as I could perceive, to converse with me. She spoke to me of my adventures in Derbyshire, of which she had not only read at the time, but had also been told again, with minuter particulars, by Mrs. Kingston; and she expressed herself in the liveliest terms of interest on behalf of the Percivals. She said that she was so rejoiced to hear from Mrs. Kingston that they were doing well and were flourishing,—adding that if she were ever in their neighbourhood she should certainly go and see them and use my name as the means of introduction. Then she turned the conversation upon books, and insisted upon seeing my little library. I indicated a shelf containing about two dozen volumes,—observing that she would doubtless smile at the limited number of the collection: to which she replied that it all depended upon the books themselves, as it was better to have two dozen good ones than two thousand valueless ones. She examined them one after the other and paid me some compliments as to the taste indicated by the selection. At this moment Mrs. Kingston joined us; and laughing, she exclaimed, "I have been looking for you everywhere, Laura; and at last it struck me that you had come up to pay Mary a visit. I see that I was not wrong."

"Your Mary and I shall become very good friends," answered Miss Maitland. "Do you want me for anything, dear cousin of mine?"

"Will you come and ride? But by the bye," added Mrs. Kingston, turning to me, "what do you think of the effrontery of that good-for-nothing fellow John? I have just been witness to a scene between the Squire and him. Now let me endeavour to describe it just as it occurred. The Squire was standing before the parlour-fire, with his riding-whip in his hand, and his hat on his head, ready to go forth and mount his horse. So John, who was sent for, made his appearance,—with none of the trepidation of last night, but looking as calm and collected as possible. Then the following dialogue took place.—'John,' said the Squire, 'you had one of my shirts on yesterday.'—'No, sir. Impossible, sir.'—'Ah, but I recognised it, though.'—'All the fault of the laundry-maid, then, sir. She does mix the linen: I've told her of it a dozen times.'—'But you had one of my handkerchiefs too.'—'Handkerchiefs, sir? No, sir. Impossible.'—'Yes, but you had though.'—'Then missus had better discharge the laundry-maid, sir, at once.'—'Perhaps it's somebody else who'll be discharged. John, you have been behaving very badly.'—'Indeed, sir. What, for spreading the report that the cholera was in the house?'—'It's no laughing

matter, John: the thing is serious. You did not pay Springfield's bill.'—'No, sir.'—'Well, but you told me yesterday that I had never given you the money. I find that I did.'—'No, sir, never: quite a mistake, sir.'—'Well, but I gave you the money to pay Tomkins.'—'Yes, sir.'—'And Giles.'—'Yes, sir.'—'And White.'—'Yes, sir.'—'And Green.'—'Yes, sir.'—'Well then, why are none of these paid?'—'Paid, sir?'—'Yes: why are none of these paid?'—'Do they say they are not paid, sir?'—'They do: will you persist that they are paid?'—'Oh, no, sir: I can't give so many respectable tradesmen the lie: it wouldn't be becoming, sir.'—'Then what have you done with the money?'—'The money did you say, sir?'—'Yes, the money. Come, speak out.'—'The fact is, sir, I am troubled with a very short memory, and so mixed it up with my own that it's all gone together.'—'Then how has it gone? Now you had better tell me the truth, because there is such a thing as the law and such a person as the constable. Out with it, John, and tell me what you did with the money.'—'Well, sir, I will. The first time I went down to pay one of those bills, I was stopped by seven men with black masks on their faces, and I was robbed.'—'Well, what else?'—'Another time, sir, I tumbled into a ditch head foremost, and the money, which was in gold, all slipped out of my pockets.'—'Anything more, John, in the same way?'—'Yes, sir. Another time, just before the cold weather set in, I went to bathe in the sea, and a thief ran away with my breeches, and all your money was in the pockets. I borrowed a pair of tarpaulin trousers of a sailor, and so came home.'—'Well, John, this is quite enough. But now, how do you account for thirty pounds' worth of my clothes and trinkets finding their way to the pawnbroker's?'—'I can't account for it, sir, unless you pawned them yourself.'—'You rascal!' cried the Squire, raising his whip: 'I have a great mind to lay this about your shoulders.'—'Better not, sir. I should have an action of assault and battery.'—'Confound this fellow's impudence! what's to be done with such a man?'—'Treat him as an invaluable servant, sir. What would you do with the Admiral, and the Mildmays and the Popkisses, and the Frenches, if it wasn't for me, sir? Ask Mr. Hutton, sir: he will tell you I am invaluable.'—'Now, John, your conduct has been very bad indeed; and you see that every thing is discovered. 'It won't do to joke over it. I mean to turn you away this minute.'—'Without a character, sir?'—'If I gave you any, it must be a precious bad one: you had better not refer to me. There are five pounds, a quarter's wages, due to you up to Christmas: if you tell me really and truly what you have done with all the money, and show that you are penniless, you shall have the five pounds: but if you don't you will not get a farthing.'—'To tell you the truth, sir, there's a club of gentlemen of my class.—'Servants you mean?'—'Well, servants, sir, if you like; but we are gentlemen when we are there; and we hold our meetings at a very respectable public-house. There's a good deal of betting going on, sir; particularly on forthcoming races.—'That's enough, John: I understand it all: I see how the money has gone. You have fallen into bad company. Now just one word, my good fellow. There are your five pounds.

and you must leave the house within half-an-hour. The servants generally shall not know what it's for: therefore your character won't be altogether ruined. I hope you will endeavour to retrieve it in your own eyes by your future conduct. Let this be a warning to you. If you play the same pranks with another master, you will not get so easy out of the scrape. And now, John, be off."—Thereupon John gathered up the five pounds, wished us both good bye as coolly as if we were parting on the best possible terms, and walked out of the room as imperturbable as ever. Of course, Mary, this is all between ourselves: for not even Mrs. Taylor nor Hutton will be made acquainted with the real cause of the man's departure."

I promised implicit silence; and Mrs. Kingston went on to observe that thenceforth there were to be no falsehoods told at the front door, but that her husband and herself had made up their minds that the answer should be "they were too much engaged to receive any visitors at all," whenever disagreeable persons called at the house. She added that Mr. Kingston, being a justice of the peace, intended to find out which the betting and sporting public-house was, and give a private intimation to the landlord that he had better be cautious in future.

My mistress and Miss Maitland now left the nursery; and soon afterwards I saw them galloping across the park in company with the Squire, while the three young ladies—Harriet, Jessy, and Maria—were endeavouring to race them on their little ponies. That same day I received a letter from Eustace, brought by a ship homeward-bound, which had passed the one wherein he was sailing. It assured me that he was in good health, and that for my sake he was endeavouring to keep up his spirits as well as he was able. I need hardly say that he wrote in the most affectionate terms, conjuring me to make myself as happy as possible, but reminding me of my promise to join him in India so soon as circumstances should permit. It was not a long letter, for there was not much time to write it when the two ships hailed each other: but it was one that tended to pour the balm of consolation into my soul. Oh! how I pressed it to my lips—how I wept over it! Should I ever behold the well-beloved writer of it again? Yes—yes: for I had faith in heaven's goodness—and, though never sanguine, yet I could not believe that I had been born to be utterly miserable through life!

But I must not dwell upon the reflections which crowded into my mind on the present occasion, and will therefore hasten to continue my narrative. Christmas was now at hand, and great preparations were made at the Grange to celebrate it in the true old English style. Three or four guests arrived to pass a few days with Mr. and Mrs. Kingston: but Mrs. Maitland of Brighton, though usually a visitress at the Grange at the Christmas season, positively refused the invitation this time, on the ground "that she would never again meet her rebellious niece Laura." This much I heard from Mrs. Kingston herself, who not only paid me frequent visits in the nursery, but treated me with a kind of friendly confidence, and was therefore often very communicative. I remember that it was on Christmas Eve she gave me a farther insight into the love-affairs of her cousin Laura. It was during the half-hour before dinner that Mrs. King-

ston ascended into the nursery to see little Catherine who not being very well, had taken medicine and had been ordered by Mr. Sands to be put to bed early,—so that my mistress came to see the child before she joined her guests at the dinner-table.

"My cousin Laura, you see, Mary," said Mrs. Kingston, "has taken a very great fancy to you: for during the last few days she has been here, she has constantly found pretexts to run up and see you. Well, poor girl, I most sincerely hope she will be happy. She possesses a noble heart and a generous disposition; and it would grieve me infinitely if she threw herself away on an unworthy object."

"I sincerely hope, ma'am," said I, "that there is no chance of such a misfortune?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Mrs. Kingston. "But I must say that I would much rather she should have fixed her affections upon an Englishman than a foreigner——"

"A foreigner!" I ejaculated involuntarily: for at the moment the whole unfortunate affair of the Countess de Montville rose vividly up in my mind.

"Not that you may suppose, Mary," continued Mrs. Kingston, scarcely appearing to observe the emphasis with which I had spoken, "that I have any prejudice against foreigners. On the contrary, I have the highest respect for them—especially the intellectual sons of classic Italy——"

"Then the object of Miss Maitland's affections is an Italian?" said I inquiringly.

"Yes: I thought I had just now told you so."

"No, ma'am. Perhaps you meant to do so, but you did not. However, I am glad that the gentleman alluded to is an Italian, and not a Frenchman," I observed, experiencing a real feeling of relief at the intelligence: and yet I scarcely know why I should have entertained any apprehension on the subject, because on calmer reflection I saw how very improbable it was that Laura Maitland should have fallen in with the branded galley-slave and fortune-hunter, Charles Leroux, *alias* the Prince de Chantilly, *alias* the Count de Montville: for I felt assured that after his terrific exposure in England he must have betaken himself to some other part of the world.

"And why are you so glad that Laura's admirer is not a Frenchman?" asked Mrs. Kingston, looking at me with some degree of surprise.

"Because, ma'am," I answered, "I was last year in the service of a lady who had been inveigled into a marriage with a most desperate character—a French adventurer of the very worst description; and at the first moment I shuddered with apprehension——"

"Well, it is very kind of you," interrupted Mrs. Kingston, "to take such an interest in my cousin: but fortunately, as a relief for your fears, the object of her attachment is an Italian nobleman, the Marquis of Visconti. He was for some few years Colonel of the Royal Guard at the Court of his Sovereign the King of Naples: but having embraced the Protestant religion through conviction, he drew down upon his head the rancour of the Jesuits, who poisoned the King's mind against him. The consequence was, he found himself compelled to leave Naples, and purposed to settle in some other part of Italy. But being still an object of persecution on

the part of the Jesuits, he left his native land in disgust, and after travelling for his amusement through Germany and France, arrived last spring in England. During the whole of the summer he has been living at Brighton; and being a nobleman of handsome person, brilliant intelligence, good manners, and of the highest honour, it is scarcely a matter of surprise that he should have succeeded in making an impression upon the heart of the poetic and somewhat romantic Laura. It appears however that from the very first Aunt Maitland took a great dislike to him; and although he visited in the very best society at Brighton, yet Mrs. Maitland studiously and rigorously abstained from inviting him to her own house. Now, this was the very conduct most calculated to rivet Laura's interest all the more firmly on behalf of the Marquis Visconti. However, without being very intimately acquainted with the details of this love-affair, I am enabled to inform you that about three weeks ago the Marquis duly sought an opportunity of proposing for my cousin Miss Laura's hand; and in so doing he acted in the most straightforward and honourable manner. He remarked that although the society in which she found him moving might be taken as a guarantee for his honour and integrity, yet that as circumstances in respect to themselves had assumed such importance, he deemed it right to convince Miss Maitland that he had sprung from one of the most ancient families of Naples—that his fortune, though by no means so large as her own, was nevertheless far from being inconsiderable—and that he had been deprived of the favour of his Sovereign for the reasons already stated, and through no fault of his own. I need hardly add that the several papers and documents which the Marquis Visconti produced, as well as the references he gave to the Neapolitan Ambassador in London, and an eminent Italian mercantile firm, also in the metropolis, were of the most satisfactory kind. Laura, though impassioned and impulsive, is neither reckless nor imprudent; and she took care, through the medium of a friend in London, to make the requisite inquiries. And now, Mary, you are as well acquainted as I am with the history of my cousin's love-affair—that is to say, so far as it has yet progressed."

"I can assure you, ma'am," was my answer, "that I am delighted to find Miss Maitland has not shown so much prudence, and that she has not been carried away entirely by her inclinations."

"Laura assures me that it is with a strong feeling of repugnance," continued Mrs. Kingston, "that she did cause those inquiries to be made relative to the Marquis Visconti: but she was urged to adopt this course not merely to satisfy herself, but likewise to be enabled to meet with a triumphant answer the ill-natured inuendos which her aunt Mrs. Maitland was constantly throwing out against the Marquis. I can well understand that a being of her generous nature, confiding disposition, and delicate feelings, must have shrunk from the idea of going in a business-like way to make inquiries into the position and character of an individual upon whom she had bestowed her heart's purest and best affections: but nevertheless, she felt it to be a duty towards herself, as well as a duty towards him who so caudily and frankly put her in possession of the means of refuting the malicious

insinuations which he must have known her aunt was constantly throwing out. Now, do you not think it would have been a shame as well as a pity, Mary, to have compelled my cousin to throw herself away upon the superannuated veteran when she had given her love to the accomplished Italian?"

"It is indeed most cruel, ma'am," I answered, "to thwart the natural inclinations of the heart, unless there be the best possible reasons for such a course."

"Certainly," exclaimed Mrs. Kingston. "To tell you the truth, such an attempt was made in respect to myself: for my friends wished me to espouse an old nobleman—quite as old as this superannuated General of whom we are speaking: but Mr. Kingston had won my heart, and therefore on him did I bestow my hand. I preferred being plain Mrs. Kingston of the Grange," added my mistress, laughing, "than becoming the titled Lady Stanfield of heaven only knows how many Halls, and Manors, and Parks, and Castles, throughout the country."

I thought to myself that Mrs. Kingston had acted wisely: for she was evidently very happy with her husband; and indeed, as I have before said, I never knew a couple more attached to each other.

"But I forgot to tell you, Mary," suddenly exclaimed my mistress, as a thought seemed to strike her, "that the Marquis Visconti is to pay a visit to the Grange immediately after Christmas. He is still at Brighton for the present. Of course he knows that Laura has withdrawn herself from her aunt's abode at Brighton and made her present home at the Grange: but it was through motives of delicacy that the Marquis remained at Brighton, lest scandalous tongues should have declared that they had eloped together. For I believe," added my mistress, again laughing, "that Brighton has its Mildmays, its Frenches, and its Popkineses, as well as Walmer. But you must not think that the Marquis is going to remain there for ever, while my fair cousin Laura buries herself in the rural seclusion of the Grange. The Squire has taken care that it shall not be so: for he has written a letter to the Marquis inviting him to pass a few weeks at the Grange after Christmas, and I have no doubt that in the course of February we shall have a wedding here. But dear me! how the time has flown while I have remained conversing here with you!"

This sudden ejaculation was elicited from Mrs. Kingston's lips by the circumstance of the dinner-bell ringing at the moment; and having kissed her little Kate, who was fast asleep in bed, she hurried down stairs.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE SUITOR.

THE Christmas festivities were over—all the guests, save Miss Maitland, had taken their departure—and the routine of life flowed on at the Grange in the way which I have described it on a former occasion. Rumours occasionally reached us of the terrible strife that was raging in Walmer between Mrs. Mildmay and her friends on the one hand, and the banded host of the Frenches, the Popkineses, the Richardsons, the Lovells, the Kitsons, the Styles

the Perkinses, and the Marigolds on the other hand: but as none of the gossips made any farther attempts to drag Mrs. Kingston into the squabble, our information as to its details remain limited and meagre.

One day, just at the beginning of the new year, Mrs. Kingston of her own accord told me that if I liked to have a day's holiday to pass with my brother and sister in Deal I was perfectly welcome,—adding that Mr. Sands had expressly told her his house-keeper would be very glad to have me as her guest on the occasion. I therefore availed myself of the kind offer, and likewise of the opportunity of a ride in the chaise-cart drawn by the old roan, as Luke had to go into Deal on some business for his master. As a matter of course I was again entertained with anecdotes illustrative of the wonderful sagacity, strength, and swiftness of the groom's favourite horse; and if they were true, their absence is certainly a great loss to all works of natural history, especially those chapters which treat of the intelligence of the equine race. However, I thanked Luke for the ride and for his stories, and before I parted from him, accepted his offer to return and fetch me in the evening, as the nights were dark and the way was lonely. I found William and Jane well and happy; and as my brother could not very easily be spared from the surgery during the earlier part of the day, I and Jane set out by ourselves for a walk. Our steps were bent in the first instance to Mrs. Seudder's cottage. The moment we made our appearance at the little garden-gate, the worthy widow opened the door and hurried out to welcome us. She had smiles upon her lips, but tears in her eyes; and the moment I caught sight of her, I felt convinced that she was experiencing some strong emotions. This idea on my part was speedily corroborated as she exclaimed, "Walk in, my dear girls: there is some one here who will be delighted to see you—for I can assure you we have been talking about you—But come in."

We entered the little-parlour; and I found, as indeed I had already suspected, that her son Tom Seudder had arrived from Portsmouth to see her. He was a fine specimen of a British sailor. Not very tall, but strongly built, he was muscular and athletic rather than stout: indeed he was well made, and although his nautical garments hung loosely upon him in the approved style amongst seamen, the good proportions of his figure were neither marred nor concealed. He was not handsome, but had a frank honest look: his countenance was brown, but not what may be termed weather-beaten: his hair was jet black, and he wore it somewhat long, as it curled naturally, and his poor old mother was very proud of it. He was about five-and-twenty years of age, and was better educated than the generality of common seamen—his father, up to the time of his death ten years back, having had the means of putting him to a good day-school at Deal. He was habited as above hinted, in the invariable sailor-like fashion,—a dark blue jacket, waistcoat, and trousers—a checked shirt, with a rolling collar leaving the neck entirely exposed, and a black silk kerchief tied loosely. A low-crowned hat of tarpaulin or oil-skin, I really know not which, lay upon a chair, with a pair of large worsted gloves, which he had evidently bought to make himself smart, but which he had not been able to induce himself to put on.

Such was the individual who with cordial shakings of the hand, welcomed Jane and myself to his mother's cottage; and then placing chairs for us, he exclaimed in a blunt good-natured manner, "Well, I am glad you have come just the very day that I have returned; because mother has been talking so much about you both that I was quite anxious to make your acquaintance."

These remarks and all his subsequent conversation were to some little extent interlarded with sea-phrases, but which I cannot for a moment pretend to recollect, and therefore make no attempt to introduce them into my narrative. I learnt that he had left Portsmouth on the previous morning—that he had arrived in London in the evening—and that being anxious to see his mother as soon as possible, he had not lingered an hour unnecessarily in the metropolis, but had travelled all night onward to Deal, where he had arrived at about eight that morning. His mother, it appeared, had endeavoured to persuade him to lie down and take a few hours' rest: but he had good-naturedly laughed at the idea, and having as he expressed himself had "a good wash and a good breakfast, he was as right as possible."

"I do not know, my dear Tom," said the widow, "about the good breakfast——"

"Why, mother," he exclaimed, "didn't you get me coffee and hot rolls, and rashers and eggs? and if that don't make a good breakfast——"

"Yes: but what I mean is, Tom," interrupted Mrs. Seudder, with some little anxiety in her look, "you did not appear to enjoy it as I thought you would."

"Oh! but I did though:—and yet as the honest sailor thus spoke, I could not help observing that he gave a sort of uneasy start as if shuddering within himself; and then, as he rose abruptly from his seat and walked to the window, methought that he swept his hand over his countenance as if dashing a tear-drop from his eye. That some such misgiving struck his mother at the same time, was evident from the hasty look which she threw from him to me, as if for the purpose of seeing whether I also had noticed anything peculiar in his manner.

"Well, my dear Tom, I am so glad that you have come back to me," she said, the tears now running down her cheeks; "and still more glad because you have given me the assurance that you will not go away again."

"No, my dear mother—I am tired of a man-of-war's life—heartily tired," he added with a sudden accent of bitterness, as he turned towards his parent: then immediately perceiving that she looked grieved and distressed, he threw his arms about her neck, embraced her with the sincerest affection, and said all he possibly could not only to cheer her spirits, but to convince her that he himself was perfectly happy. But these little evidences of feeling on both sides were irresistibly bringing them to dangerous ground; and it was easy to conjecture that during the two or three hours they had been together ere Jane and I called, the *one* dread topic had not as yet been touched upon. The young sailor said that he was happy; but I saw that he was *not*. Mingled with the honest good-nature and frankness of his look, there was an air of melancholy—rather of depression and despondency, which he was evidently struggling against, but which would nevertheless

peep out in spite of himself; so that even when he tried to give a joyous smile, it turned into ghastliness—and when he endeavoured to speak in cheerful accents, they unconsciously merged into irony or bitterness. All these circumstances did I notice within the first half-hour that I was in his presence: and they fully corroborated the suspicion I had formed some time back on reading the letter he had sent his mother from Portsmouth, and of the impression that it left upon me at the time I duly spoke in its place.

But as I have observed, the dangerous point was now being approached: the feelings of the mother and son were irresistibly leading them towards that topic which it would have been well if they could have avoided, but to which they were thus led by the strongest compulsion, as a ship is drawn nearer and nearer to the engulfing whirlpool. For on the one hand there can be no doubt that the sailor longed to pour forth the grief of his surcharged heart into the bosom of his mother: while on the other hand, the good widow herself, now no longer able to blind her eyes to the circumstance of her son's inward agitation, was equally anxious to proffer all possible consolations. I thought it better that Jane and I should now take our departure, with a promise to call again in the afternoon: but the moment I rose from my seat and spoke my intention, the sailor disengaged himself from the embrace in which his mother had held him, and evidently mastering his inward feelings, exclaimed in a joyous tone and with frank hilarity of manner, "No, no, Miss Price—you are not going to run away thus, the very moment we are getting properly acquainted. Why, God bless you! though I have only known you and your sister here for a bare half-hour, I look upon you both as old friends. So you may guess how my mother has been talking of you."

Mrs. Scudder likewise insisted that we should remain, at least for a little while longer: and being thus compelled to do so, I did my best to give a complete turn to the conversation, so as to carry it away from the painful point which it had been approaching. But still with the sailor was there that under-current of despondency visible beneath the joyous air which he endeavoured to assume, and still too was that occasional bitterness perceptible in his accents. His pent-up feelings were like gunpowder which the faintest spark would cause to explode.

At length, after a brief pause, Mrs. Scudder unfortunately remarked, "I suppose you will be going out presently, Tom, to call upon some of your old acquaintances? It will do you good."

"No, mother," he abruptly exclaimed; "it will do me harm: for I cannot look them in the face! There now—I have said it! and by heaven, it is the truth!" he added, smiting himself violently with his palm upon the breast.

"Oh! my dear son, do not talk thus!" cried the poor widow, clasping her hands and bursting into tears. "For your own sake—for my sake—do not give way! And if this is not enough, I conjure you by the memory of your father, now ten years dead, and for whom I have vowed to wear these weeds until my death——"

"Mother, do not talk to me of my father!" interrupted the sailor, as he rose from his seat—and there was something like a mournful sternness in his

tone. "*He* never was disgraced by the branding scourge!—*he* never was tied up in the sight of his fellow-men stripped shamefully, and lacerated brutally! But I, mother—I shall carry to the grave the deep marks of the ferocious cat!"

He had spoken with exceeding vehemence as he went on,—all the pent-up violence of his feelings bursting forth in the impetuosity of his language. A deep flush mantled upon his embrowned countenance—his eyes seemed to flash fire—his nostrils dilated—but his lips quivered as he spoke. I could perceive too that he clenched his fists with a violence that drove the nails into the palms of his hands, and made all the sinews stand out at the backs.

"For mercy's sake, my dear, dear boy," said the poor widow, throwing herself upon her knees at his feet, "do not, do not give way thus! It is more than I can bear!"

"Ah! and more than I can bear also!" cried Tom Scudder, with intense bitterness. "Oh, my dear mother!" he immediately exclaimed, as her convulsive sobs met his ears, and as I and Jane stooped to raise her up—a duty which he, quickly anticipating us in it, suddenly performed; and placing her upon a seat, he pressed her hand between both his own. "Oh, my dear mother! not for worlds would I plant a dagger in your heart: but you must let me speak it all out now. It will give me relief—and I think I can promise that when all I have to say is once said, I can refrain from the subject in future."

"Then speak, my son—speak!" said the widow. "Yes—pour forth your sorrows—I was wrong to check them."

"No, no—not wrong!" cried Scudder, impetuously. "You did it for the best. But, Oh! when the heart is full almost to bursting, it is an infinite relief to give vent to its sorrows. And I speak now before our friend Mary Price, because she is acquainted with my disgrace, and she is a being so good that I wish to justify myself in her eyes. It was impossible to write all the details of my story: but I must now tell them in words."

"You need not justify yourself," was my immediate remark, given too with earnest warmth: "for I have read enough in the letters from your messmate and yourself to prove that you were provoked——"

"Provoked?—Ah! to a degree beyond all human patience!" exclaimed the sailor. "Fancy to yourself a coarse, brutal, hard-hearted wretch, presuming upon the favour into which he had managed to work himself with the Captain, to tyrannize over all who were under him,—an ill-conditioned ruffian, whose character is written in his vile countenance—constantly maddened by spirits as well as by his own evil passions—delighting in every species of cruelty both to men and dumb animals, so that even a dog or a cat would instinctively shrink from him,—fancy, I say, such a man as this, and you have before you the image of John Plummers the boatswain. Now you must know that this man is what is called a warrant-officer, and he has got great authority over the men. Picture to yourself the most heartless of wretches using this authority for the purpose of making all his inferiors miserable. For a long time he had particularly marked me out. I was gay and cheerful; and this did not



please his morose character: so I soon saw that he hated me. But I determined not to give him an opportunity of doing me an injury; and no words can tell the insults I have put up with—the taunts I have endured—the goadings that I have patiently submitted to. At last, in an evil moment I struck him—it was this hand that did it—I am almost sorry that it did not kill him on the spot!"

"No, no, Tom—you must not speak like this," ejaculated the widow. "For heaven's sake tranquillize yourself as much as you can:"—and she raised her countenance in tearful supplication.

"Well, well, I will calm myself, mother, as much as I am able. But let me tell you how it was I got led to strike Cat-o'-nine-tail Jack, as we called the boatswain, because he was always getting men strung up and flogged for nothing. One day there was a cry of '*A man over-board!*' I was near the gangway, and I hastened to look down. The boatswain came up, and thrusting his elbow into my side,

said in a brutal voice, 'Coward, why don't you leap in and rescue him?'—I remember that I started: every vein tingled; and it was a wonder that then and there I did not fell him upon the deck. But the next instant I sprang from the gangway, and plunged into the sea. It was blowing hard, and the waves were running high at Spithead at the time: so that I had a struggle to battle against them. But I succeeded in catching hold of the drowning man, and supported him above water until I could clutch the rope which had been thrown out. In a few minutes it was all done: the man was saved—and I also stood upon the deck again. Several of my messmates crowded round to congratulate me upon what I had done: but Cat-o'-nine-tail Jack, pushing brutally through them, clenched his fist in my face, and demanded in his hoarse ruffian voice why I had dared to call him a coward as we just now stood together in the gangway? So enraged was I at this wicked accusa-

tion,—for it was *he* who had taunted *me* with cowardice—that I lost all control over myself; and thundering forth the word ‘*Liar!*’ struck him down. The men around applauded—the fellow sprang up—a lieutenant came to inquire what the disturbance was about—and of course Plummers told his own story after his own style. So I was put in irons. Ah! mother, as I felt those shackles upon my limbs I felt also that the iron itself was eating into my soul. But I cannot bear to think of all the horrible things that used to pass through my mind during the time I was in confinement till the court-martial sat. Well, it did sit; and the boatswain’s story was told. Mine was also told; and I think that some of the officers believed it—they looked as if they did. But then I couldn’t deny that I had struck the boatswain; and *that* was an offence which, as I was told, could not be passed over. However, the circumstance of my saving the man’s life told in my favour, and was taken into account when the punishment was awarded. I had rendered myself liable to death by hanging—”

“Oh, my God!” murmured the poor widow, shuddering visibly from head to foot, while both Jane and myself shook with a kindred feeling of horror.

“Yes—but for all the reasons I have stated,” continued the sailor, “the punishment was very much mitigated, and I was sentenced to a number of lashes—I will not tell you how many—it would make you shudder. And those lashes I received. If I was to think of all the strongest words I ever learnt at school or know the meaning of now, they wouldn’t be strong enough to make you understand what that punishment is. Horror of horrors, when I think of it! The pain—Ah *that* is nothing: it is the infamy—the disgrace! Fancy if a man came into this room at this moment and dared to lay his hand upon me—I don’t care one farthing who he might be—I should not wait to ask: but I should knock him down. Oh! conceive then the degradation of being tied up and lacerated without the means of self-defence! It is not the agony of the blows that I now feel: I do not think any longer of the pieces of skin that were flayed off—nor of the bits of flesh torn out;—but it is the disgrace—the stigma—”

“Oh! my dear son, this scene is dreadful!” exclaimed the poor widow, springing up from her seat and winding her arms about the sailor’s neck. “I can fancy how dreadfully you must feel it all, since not even for *my* sake you can refrain from these terrible outpourings!”

“My dear mother, it is more than a man can endure,” answered her son, in a deep voice and with corrugating eyebrows, so that for an instant there appeared to be a dreadful scowl upon his countenance. “A man feels not only degraded, but brutalized after the punishment of the cat. Oh! people who know nothing of what takes place on board a man-of-war, may sing songs about ‘jolly tars’ and nonsense of that sort; but they little think that the sailor’s life is one constant endurance of tyranny of some sort accompanied by the terror of the lash. For my part I loved the sailor’s life when first I embraced it: I loved it till I began to know the tyrannies of John Plummers: but I did not hate it even then. And yet I hate it now—have hated it with the most cordial bitter hatred ever since the hideous cat first touched my back. Mother, I am

now a sailor in the Royal Navy no more! My ship is paid off—I am free—and by heaven! if I beheld you—yes, even *you*, my mother, whom I love so fondly—starving before my eyes, I would not enter that service again. No, no: sooner would I crawl as the most grovelling beggar upon the face of the earth, than return to the deck of a man-of-war with the chance of going through that torture and disgrace again!”

There was an extraordinary power in the sailor’s language. The fearful sincerity of the passion which animated it—the terrible earnestness with which he depicted his feelings, enhanced it into an awful sublimity of eloquence; while every look and every gesture increased the effect of his words. I do not pretend to have accurately recorded what he said: I have merely endeavoured to convey the sense as nearly as I could; for it was interspersed with *sear-terms*, which did not however impart the slightest air of ludicrousness to his language: on the contrary, the expression of his feelings in his own peculiar style, conveyed the idea of the most heartfelt sincerity. I pitied that man from the very depths of my soul. I beheld in him a noble nature warped and disfigured by a brutalizing punishment: I recognized in him a fine spirit crushed beneath an inhuman and barbarous infliction; and I thought to myself that before the British nation dared call itself civilized in the face of the whole world, it should abolish with one universal yell of execration the demoralizing and degrading punishment of the lash.

I did not weep when the sailor had finished speaking—though his mother was weeping bitterly, and Jane threw her arms around the poor widow’s neck beseeching her to be comforted, but weeping also. I did not weep, I say—because although the compassion which I felt for that man, so abased and ruined in his own estimation, would have melted me into tears, yet mingled with this feeling was the sterner one of a powerful indignation that the authority thus brutally to maltreat any individual should be arrogantly usurped by the heartless portion of his fellow-creatures.

I will not however dwell at any greater length upon this scene: suffice it to say that it was throughout most painful; and although the poor sailor fancied, and even promised, that when once he had given vent to his harrowed feelings and told his sad tale, he would be enabled to avoid the topic in future, I knew full well in my own heart that the sense of his degradation would cling to him throughout life with the tenacity of a remorse or of a curse. But for the time being he did grow calmer—even completely tranquilized, to all outward appearance; and again flinging his arms round his mother’s neck, he besought her pardon for having caused her such cruel anguish. He implored and entreated her to dry her tears and hush her sobs; and the poor old woman, eagerly catching at the hope that he himself felt happier now that his mind was relieved of a burden, became consoled. In this mood we left them, promising to return again on the next occasion that I should obtain a holiday;—and deeply impressed with all that we had seen and heard, Jane and I retraced our way to Mr. Sands’ house. William, immediately observing by our countenances that something had occurred, manifested alarm; and when I told him what had

happened, he expressed himself in the strongest terms of loathing and horror at the demoniac punishment of the scourge.

The pleasure which I should otherwise have experienced in company with my brother and sister, and Mr. Sands' kind housekeeper, was altogether damped by the impression left on my mind by the painful scene I had witnessed; and I felt a despondency which I could not shake off. At eight o'clock in the evening Luke came for me according to promise; and during the ride home, although he never ceased talking the whole way about the admirable qualities of the old roan, I caught not a single word that he said. I was thinking entirely of the moral wreck to which the poor widow's son was reduced in his own estimation by the punishment he had received.

On the following morning I learnt from Mrs. Kingston that the Marquis Visconti was expected at the Grange during the day. While we were conversing upon the subject, Miss Maitland herself came up into the nursery; and I saw that her looks were even more replete with happiness than they were wont to be, animated with youthful spirits and with the joyous sense of a hitherto unclouded existence as she ever was. With the keen perception of one who loves, and who from that mere fact is sensitively intelligent in respect to being the subject of conversation,—a conversation, too, in the midst of which those who are talking on the subject are thus broken in upon,—Laura Maitland immediately saw that this was now the case with her and with us. A crimson glow flushed her countenance: but the sunlight of happiness danced in her beautiful blue eyes, and played in smiles upon her exquisitely chiselled lips.

"I see," she said, "that you have been talking about me; and I am at no loss to conjecture upon what subject. You, my dear cousin, have been telling Mary that the Marquis is coming here to-day; and I dare say you are both very anxious to see him. Now, do not picture to yourself a slim, languishing-looking, romantic youth of one-and-twenty—because he is nothing of the kind—"

"Such is not the portrait I have drawn in imagination of the Marquis," interrupted Mrs. Kingston, laughing. "Don't I know that he was for some years an officer of rank in the Royal Guard at Naples?—therefore I cannot suppose him to be a mere boy. Now I will tell you what my ideal is concerning this nobleman. He is a little past thirty—perhaps midway between that and forty—perhaps even nearer forty—tall, fine-looking, of commanding presence, and exhibiting the frank manliness of a soldier blended with the elegant manners of a gentleman."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Laura, in joyous good-humour. "But as I have never as yet entered very minutely into such particulars with you, my dear cousin, I shall not now. In a few hours you will be enabled to judge for yourself. But since you have been both talking of me in a particular strain, I shall punish at least one of you by extorting a confession. Now, my dear cousin, I need not ask whether you know what love is: because I am well aware that you married the Squire through purest affection. But I shall ask my young friend here, Mary Price, whether *she* has ever known what love is? Ah! you blush, you quiet sedate puss, do you?

Now doesn't she look handsome, Lizzy, when she blushes like this?—but heavens! the tears are coming into her eyes—she weeps! Oh, Mary, I did not for a moment intend to distress you! It was a silly idle jest of mine—pray forgive me!"—and taking my hand, she pressed it warmly.

The words she had uttered so suddenly—so unexpectedly—had excited in all their vivid poignancy the sense of affliction which I experienced at being separated from Eustace Quentin: and I could not control those tears which thus elicited her apologies and her demonstrations of kindness. She and Mrs. Kingston both perceived in a moment that a tender chord had been touched in my heart, and that delicate ground was thoughtlessly entered upon in respect to myself. I hastened to wipe away my tears: and Laura, again pressing my hand, quickly turned the conversation upon another subject, addressing me with even more than her wonted kindness and condescension,—while Mrs. Kingston likewise spoke in a manner that might even be termed affectionate,—so anxious were these excellent-hearted ladies to make amends for the pain which one of them had so unintentionally produced. The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a servant to announce that the Squire wished to know whether the ladies wished to ride this forenoon;—and sending back an affirmative reply, they hastened to their chambers to put on their riding-habits.

I now prepared to take little Catherine out for her usual exercise; and her pony being in readiness, we roamed about the park and the spacious grounds attached to the mansion. It was about two o'clock when we returned to the house; and I was just lifting little Kate off her pony, when the sounds of a rapidly approaching vehicle reached my ears. I looked and beheld an elegant travelling-carriage, with four post-horses, dashing up the gravel road towards the Grange; and I immediately knew that this must be the Marquis Visconti. An individual in plain clothes, and whom I concluded to be the nobleman's valet, was seated upon the box. He was about thirty years of age, and seemed to be a foreigner,—his swarthy countenance and dark hair indicating his Italian origin. I confess I was most anxious to obtain a glimpse of his master; and I know not how it was, but I really dreaded lest I should see the glossy black moustache, the imperial upon the chin, and the long curling dark hair of the false Count de Montville: but in this I was agreeably mistaken—and it was with an unspeakable feeling of relief that the first glance I threw into the carriage as it dashed up to the door, showed me a beardless face, and short hair, though dark, and curling in the true Italian style, beneath the gold band of an elegant travelling cap.

At this moment the Squire, Mrs. Kingston, and Laura Maitland, who had already returned from their ride, came forth to welcome the Marquis; and I hurried with little Kate up to the nursery.

CHAPTER XCIII.

THE VALET.

THE reader has already been made aware that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston were devotedly attached to their children. The three young ladies,—Harriet, Jessy,

and Maria,—were always accustomed to dine in the parlour; and it was seldom little Kate was not had down after dinner at dessert-time, or else into the drawing-room in the evening. Accordingly, on the day of which I am speaking, I was summoned in the evening to take my little charge down into the dining-room, where my master and mistress, Miss Maitland, and the Marquis, with the three young ladies, were seated at table. The Italian nobleman was placed with his back towards the door, so that I did not immediately observe his countenance upon entering. Mrs. Kingston kept me for two or three minutes asking me a few questions about Kate, as she had been rather unwell lately; and while I was replying, the Marquis happened to turn his head and look towards me. I was immediately struck by the expression of his countenance: for the conviction seized upon me that I had seen those features before. I even started—but recovered myself so quickly, that my abrupt emotion escaped the notice of those present. I looked at him again, rapidly but irresistibly; and then I felt bewildered—for the countenance no longer seemed the same, and now I was equally convinced that I had been mistaken.

On regaining the nursery I sat down to reflect upon the little incident which I have just related. To tell the truth, it had struck me that the expression of the Marquis Visconti's countenance was indeed that of Charles Leroux, *alias* the Count de Montville; but as I have said, a second glance at those features made me think otherwise. I reasoned with myself that as the Count de Montville had been incessantly running in my head ever since I first heard that the object of Laura Maitland's love was a foreign nobleman, it was quite conceivable that I should have been led by fancy to recognize a similitude between the Marquis and that adventurer. And now I began to compare them in other respects. This Marquis had dark hair like the Count's: but then the former's was thick and luxuriant on the crown, whereas that of the Count was very thin even to incipient baldness. The Marquis was handsomely though simply dressed, with very little jewellery: whereas the false Count had always worn a profusion of trinkets. The Marquis had a dark complexion—so had the Count: but the former had a colour upon his cheeks, in which the Count was altogether deficient. It was not exactly easy to conjecture the age of the Marquis Visconti—but I set it down at about five-and-thirty: whereas that of the Count de Montville must be certainly forty. In all these traits and characteristics there were many discrepancies between the two: but with regard to the figure, there did not seem to be the same difference, so far as I could judge by having only seen the Marquis in a sitting posture. It however struck me that he was at least six feet in height—not stout, but finely made, and symmetrical in his proportions. Just so was the Count de Montville.

Thus I went on, mentally comparing the two in order to arrive at the conclusion whether they were identically one: and I certainly endeavoured to find as many reasons as I could to persuade myself that such was not the case. Nevertheless, I felt a little uneasiness. I could have wished that this Marquis Visconti had been characterized by more marked discrepancies to distinguish him from that shameless adventurer the false Count de Montville; so that at a single glance I might have been assured

that they were utterly distinct persons. But after all, I began to smile at this uncertain misgiving to which I had yielded myself; and I said, "I am really very foolish thus to permit a mere doubt to plunge me into all this painful train of reasoning for the purpose of clearing it up. If it had been the Count de Montville, I must have recognized him at once, notwithstanding the absence of the glossy black moustache and the tuft on the chin. How absurd to torture myself in this way,—just as if I did not remember that French adventurer sufficiently to be able to detect him at once! Besides, were it indeed he, would he not have started? would not his glance have quailed? would he not have shown some sign of guilt on so suddenly beholding me? But no: he looked at me with the easy indifference of one who sees a perfect stranger; and not even for a single instant did he wear the slightest appearance of being disconcerted. No: assuredly my fears are as groundless as they are injurious to the character of this Italian nobleman. But, ah! there is one test which will clear up all doubt, if any yet be lingering in my mind. The hands!—it would be impossible to mistake the coarse vulgar hands of the Count de Montville."

I accordingly resolved when descending to fetch little Kate again, to observe if possible the hands of the Marquis Visconti; and it was not without some degree of trepidation, arising from a lingering uncertainty and uneasiness in my mind, that I obeyed the summons which presently came for me to descend. On entering the dining-room, I observed the Marquis and Laura standing together in conversation in front of the fire: the Squire was still at table enjoying his wine—and Mrs. Kingston was playing with Kate upon her knee. I had now full opportunity of observing the height of the Marquis; and it struck me that he was even taller than the Count de Montville. I glanced towards his hands: but he had one negligently thrust into the bosom of his waistcoat; and in the other he held his white kerchief—so that I was disappointed in obtaining a glimpse of them. I took Kate from Mrs. Kingston; and as I was about to leave the room, Miss Maitland exclaimed, "Oh! bring the dear child to me, Mary, for a moment. I cannot let her go without kissing her."

The child ran towards her good-natured cousin; and Laura, snatching her up in her arms, began kissing her affectionately. I now stood within a few feet of the Marquis; and as he turned partially round to caress the little one, I could not help fixing my eyes earnestly upon him. I endeavoured to picture to myself what would be the expression of the false Count de Montville's face, from the recollection I had of it, if it were denuded of its moustache and chin-tuft—if it were not shaded by long hair—and if it had no colour upon the duskiness of the complexion. But in this very endeavour I found myself bewildered—at one instant fancying that I beheld the Count before me—and then feeling equally assured that it was nothing of the sort. I listened to the tones of the Marquis Visconti's voice as he made some complimentary observations upon the good looks of the little child: but they certainly did not strike me to be the same as the Count de Montville's. The Marquis likewise spoke the English language with less accuracy than the Count had done, and with a different

accent: but as a matter of course, these peculiarities might have obviously been feigned, and therefore weighed as nothing in the balance: yet on the other hand, it struck me as being not so easy to alter the natural tones of one's voice. Altogether, I left the room in a strange state of bewilderment,—by no means reassured—having failed to obtain a glimpse of the Italian nobleman's hands—yet not able to say to myself that they had been purposely concealed from my view. On regaining the nursery, I could not divert my thoughts from this new topic which had engrossed them; and though I did my best to persuade myself that my imagination was deluded by a certain degree of resemblance existing between the two foreigners, yet I could not help seeing the possibility of their being one and the same.

"If so," I said to myself, "God help poor Laura Maitland!—for her heart is entirely devoted to her lover. Not for worlds would I raise a suspicion in her mind until I convince myself beyond the possibility of farther doubt that my worst apprehensions are correct. But in that case, without hesitation would I unmask the adventurer!"

When I had put little Kate to bed, one of the housemaids came up into the nursery to attend to some few matters there; and instead of remaining in the room, as was my wont, I obeyed the inclination which prompted me to descend into the servants' hall. There is no need to disguise the nature of this prompting: I wished to see something of the Marquis Visconti's valet: for my experience of the world told me that in the conduct, manner, conversation, and general bearing of a person's servants, may no mean estimate be formed of the character of the person himself. On entering the servants' hall I observed the valet sitting near the fire, with a mug of ale in his hand, but taking no part in the conversation that was going on amongst the domestics of the household. Room was made for me to sit down; and without appearing to pay any marked attention to the valet, I took an opportunity of surveying him carefully. His complexion, as I have already said, was very dark; but as I regarded him, the thought gradually and imperceptibly stole into my mind that I had seen those features before. I strove to recollect where and when—but could not. Presently I looked at him again; and the thought deepened into conviction that the face was not altogether unfamiliar: but still my memory would not serve me sufficiently, intricately as I racked it, to furnish me with any additional particulars. I joined in the conversation, so that it might not appear I had any special motive in coming down at the time; and as I again looked stealthily towards the man, I observed that his eyes were fixed with earnest attention upon myself. They were instantaneously averted: but it struck me that it was not altogether with indifference that he had been gazing at me. Let me not be misunderstood: I do not mean that I saw he had become interested in me in any sense save that of one who knew me, or else fancied that he had seen me before. Presently the butler addressed some observation to the Italian valet; and the reply was given in such broken English as to be well nigh unintelligible: but the voice—I felt convinced that I had heard it before! One of the female servants whispered to me that the Marquis's valet was very silent and reserved—never speaking

but when spoken to: but this she attributed to his ignorance of the English language. She told me that his Christian name was Francisco, and that she was much disappointed in him; for that her ideas relative to a foreign valet had been of a more elevated character than his deportment seemed to bear out, inasmuch as he was coarse and vulgar in his habits at table. She would have gone on chattering longer in the same whispering strain; but I had not time to listen to her, and was obliged to ascend again to the nursery.

The appearance of that valet had troubled me. That I knew him I felt convinced: but where had I seen him before? where had I heard that voice? I could not conjecture: for I did not even recollect ever having met a foreign servant at all under any circumstances. I endeavoured to persuade myself that I must be mistaken: but I could not. I was now haunted by misgivings. They were mere suspicions, it is true—and too flimsy to warrant me in mentioning them to a soul: but I resolved to take some step to clear them up in one sense or another, and to watch as much as I could or dared the demeanour and conduct alike of master and man. Suddenly a thought struck me. What if I were to write to Mr. Appleton, the Countess de Montville's uncle, and inquire if he knew anything of the recent proceedings of the individual by whom his niece had been so cruelly deceived and swindled? I was acquainted with his address in London; and that very night, before I went to bed, I wrote him a letter earnestly requesting a reply; but as I could not thus intrude upon his notice without giving some reason, I frankly stated that there was a person in the neighbourhood so much resembling the French adventurer, as to warrant me in taking this step. I slept but little that night; for my mind was harassed by the misgivings which had arisen therein.

On the following day Mrs. Kingston and Laura did not pay their accustomed visit to the nursery, because they were going out for a long ride with the Squire and the Marquis, to show the latter the environs of the estate and any features of interest that existed in the neighbourhood. When I took Kate down to give her her usual airing on the pony, I carried my letter in my hand to leave it in the hall, in the usual place where letters were deposited ready for one of the men-servants to take them down to the post in Deal. The Italian valet was lounging in the hall at the time: but I thought nothing of this circumstance. Having exchanged a friendly word with the old porter Hutton, I descended the steps and placed Kate upon her pony, which a groom was holding in readiness. The man observed that he thought it was likely to rain: I therefore hastened back into the hall to fetch an umbrella from the stand where there were always several; and to my astonishment I saw the Italian valet standing at the window-recess where I had left my letter, and evidently reading the direction upon it, but with his back towards the place where Hutton sat in his great chair. He turned abruptly round on hearing my footsteps, and for an instant seemed overwhelmed with confusion: but instantaneously recovering himself, he hastened to stammer an excuse.

"Me no look letter for de purpose—me do it widout tinkin—me vare sorry—vare misdecreet—how you say it?"

I made him no answer, but showed by my looks that I felt indignant at his impertinent curiosity; and taking the umbrella, passed out of the hall. But while accompanying Catherine in her ride, I could not help thinking that it was something more than a mere impertinent curiosity which had induced that man to read the address on my letter. Yet what motive could he have? That was beyond my conjecture: nevertheless such was my conviction; and it served materially to strengthen the suspicions which already existed in my mind. I felt uneasy and unhappy: presentiments of evil, on behalf of those in whom I was interested, crowded quickly in upon my mind; and I almost resolved to seize an opportunity of frankly and candidly avowing my misgivings and their cause to Mrs. Kingston. But while I was deliberating with myself relative to such a step, the riding party came advancing through the park; and as they passed close by me and Kate, and reined in their horses for a few moments to speak to the child, I again surveyed the Marquis from head to foot. More bewildered than ever, I could not help saying to myself, "No: it assuredly is not the French adventurer Charles Leroux."

On returning to the mansion, as I passed through the hall, I looked to see if my letter was still there: but the old porter, understanding my motive, said, "The letters are all gone down to the post. Luke took them half-an-hour back. By the bye, Mary, that was rather a cool thing of the foreigner to go and look at your letter like that. I saw him move across the hall directly you had gone out: but I thought he merely went to lounge in that window and look out of it. So I suppose he did: but still it was very unmannerly of him to turn the letter right over, which he did, and read the address. I don't like the looks of that fellow a bit: but then I always have had a prejudice against foreigners, and so perhaps I ought not to give an opinion."

"It is certainly wrong, Mr. Hutton, to entertain a general prejudice," I observed: "but there is no doubt that Francisco is very rude to examine a letter."

In the course of the evening I sought an opportunity to ask Luke whether he had noticed amongst the letters one addressed to Mr. Appleton in London? for the idea had struck me that it was just possible for the Italian valet to have abstracted it, if he really had any sinister motive in examining the address. But Luke, who was a blunt off-hand man, thoroughly honest in his way, and endowed with as little curiosity as the most indifferent of beings could possibly possess, at once replied that there were several letters in the hall-window when he went to fetch them, but he had swept them all into his bag without noticing any in particular. I therefore failed to obtain positive information upon the point: but I resolved that if I did not receive an answer from Mr. Appleton in the course of a few days, I would write again, and on the next occasion take special care that my letter should reach the post. After dinner I again took Kate down stairs: again too did I endeavour to obtain a glimpse of the Marquis's hands; but again was my attempt frustrated. Yet I had no reason for positive assurance that he purposely and studiously concealed them.

On the following morning I heard from one of my fellow-servants that the Italian valet had set off early to return to Brighton on some business for his master,—to fetch some things which his lordship wanted, and which he had omitted to bring with him. Mrs. Kingston and Laura came up into the nursery, the former all good humour, the latter all radiant happiness. They did not speak to me a single word concerning the Marquis; and I understood full well the dejection of their motives. They had discovered my secret—that I loved; and they were therefore fearful of touching upon any topic calculated to re-awaken those painful feelings which they saw had been excited in me two mornings back by the bare allusion to the tender sentiment. This day passed without any incident worthy of mention; and as there was company to dine in the evening, little Kate was not taken down as usual either to the dining or drawing rooms. On the following morning I looked anxiously for the arrival of the postman: but he brought no letter for me. I determined to wait for the next post; and if no reply came from Mr. Appleton to write again. But on this day an incident did occur which forms no mean episode in the varied chain of my life's adventures.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when a letter was brought up to me in the nursery. The address was written in a rude hand, evidently by an uneducated person, and all badly spelt. The contents ran as follow:—

"king's ed, warmer rode

"dere mari

"here i am cum 2 see you but lade up with a broken arm which was broke by aggsident as i got off the cochoe at this plais. pray cum and see me immedjetly as i am very badd and the peple here isn't attentiff as they had ought to be to a person crippled as i be. the pott-boy rites this 2 mi dictashun. i've gott a docker wich as drest my arm an he ses it's a compoun frackter. you must gett leve 2 cum and see me at wunst. the king's ed is a very spectible plais. so you needn't be a shamed 2 cum. dere mari, your

"feeshunate bruther robbert prise."

I had some trouble in deciphering this letter, the meaning of which appeared to be that my unfortunate brother Robert had fallen off a coach, had broken his arm, and was lying at the *King's Head* public-house on the Walmer Road, where he had received the attendance of a doctor, but that the people of the house were not attentive to him, so that he wished to see me at once—and that he had got the pot-boy to pen this letter. I was naturally much grieved at the accident which had thus befallen my brother, and lost no time in sending in a message by one of the footmen to the dining-room to Mrs. Kingston to ask for permission to go down and see Robert. My mistress came out in person to answer my request, I having waited for the response in the hall. With great sympathy for my own feelings, she at once accorded the permission I required, and gave orders that Luke should at once take me down in the chaise-cart. She likewise observed that if anything could be done for my brother to make him comfortable, I was not to hesitate to ask any service at her hands; and she even testified her kindness to such an extent as to say that if I liked to have him removed up to the Grange, I was at liberty to do so. Thanking her most cordially for her goodness, I hastened up-

stairs to put on my things: and ere descending likewise took with me all the money I had, consisting of three sovereigns—the remnant of Mr. Sands' bounty, and a month's wages which I had received at the Grange. On descending, I found Luke waiting for me with the chaise-cart and the old roan. As I was traversing the hall, the Italian valet entered the mansion, having evidently just returned from the mission on which he had been despatched by his master. I had not however any leisure now to devote my thoughts to the foreign Marquis or his domestic, all my ideas being concentrated in this new trouble which had suddenly arisen in respect to Robert.

Luke discoursed as usual upon the qualities of the old roan; and I certainly on this occasion was glad to find that the animal's speed was worthy of his eulogies. Through the darkness of the cold January evening we literally flew along the lanes leading down into the Walmer Road, and in a very short time drew up at the *King's Head*, which belonged to a row of small and poor-looking houses fronting the sea at a distance of barely fifty yards from the beach. I alighted; and Luke offered to stop for me, or to call again. I asked him if he had anywhere to go in order to while away an hour or so; and he replied in the affirmative. The chaise-cart accordingly dashed away with the old roan; and I turned to enter the tavern. But on the threshold I was met by a queer-looking, dirty, ill-dressed little man, with a fur cap upon his head, and his shirt-sleeves tucked up to his shoulders, although it was a bitter cold evening.

"You be Miss Price?" he said, setting down just within the doorway a couple of empty pewter pots which he was carrying.

"Yes," I answered, instantaneously conjecturing that I was addressing the man who had written the letter. "Where is my brother?"

"He's moved to a lodging, Miss," answered the man; "cos why"—and sidling out of the doorway, he drew me apart from the view of the people in the bar within—"our folks here wasn't over and above civil; and so your brother went off in a tantrum. But come with me, Miss: it be close by."

The pot-boy pulled down his shirt sleeves, and walked rapidly along, with me following him close. Then I recollected that Luke would call back at the public-house for me; and I told the pot-boy to be sure and fetch me the moment the groom should arrive with the cart. He promised to do so; and I gave him some silver for his trouble, as I suspected that my brother Robert was not over well provided with money, or else he would not have sent for me.

"This way, Miss," said the man, suddenly turning round a corner: and then we plunged into almost total darkness—for we were now beyond the sphere of the rays of light glimmering from the windows of the houses. We skirted a long low wall for three or four minutes; and then all of a sudden the man gave a peculiar whistle—and quick as a lightning flash did the conviction strike me that I was betrayed into a snare. I turned to fly, but was instantaneously seized upon by two men, the pot-boy likewise lending his assistance. Dark though it was, yet the gloom of this starless and moonless evening was not so profound as to prevent me from recognizing the hang-dog countenances of the two ruffians

who had seized upon me—the Bulldog and Sawbridge!

I screamed out; but one of them immediately put his hand upon my mouth, and at the horrible contact of the miscreant I fainted. When I came to myself, I was in a sort of covered cart, which was tearing away at a tremendous pace, Sawbridge being the driver. The Bulldog was seated by his side on the front bench: and I was lying in the bottom of the cart, with my head supported against another bench, exactly no doubt in the position in which I had been buddled into the vehicle. It had no springs and was jolting horribly. I felt sore with bruises; and it was doubtless this rough treatment that had recalled me so soon to life—for it was evident enough that neither Sawbridge nor the Bulldog had taken the slightest trouble to restore me. This was a matter of congratulation; for nothing could be conceived more abhorrent and loathsome than to be touched by those dreadful characters.

Although I had thus returned to consciousness, I did not immediately move, but lay still where I was to collect my ideas. That I was the victim of some deeply conceived plot, was but too evident: but what end was it to serve? what was to be done with me? Surely it was not to gratify any vindictive feelings on the part of Sawbridge and the Bulldog: because I had done nothing to provoke them since they had threatened me in the neighbourhood of Winchester. If I had given such information when they robbed me of my all in the Deal coach, as to have raised a hue and cry after them, it would not be so difficult to comprehend the meaning of the present proceeding: but I had not—I had carefully foreborne from any such course, for the very purpose of avoiding their rancorous hostility; and therefore this was not the execution of mere personal vengeance. What then could it be? Imperceptibly a gradual suspicion stole into my mind, associating this present outrage with the Marquis Visconti and his Italian valet. That sudden journey on the part of the latter—might it not have been undertaken for the express purpose of arranging the present plan? and might not the false Marquis have been led to the adoption of this extreme measure in consequence of Francisco having seen the address of my letter to Mr. Appleton—perhaps purloined the letter itself? If these conjectures were right, then there could be no farther doubt as to the identity of the Marquis Visconti with the Count de Montville; and the inevitable inference was that I was now being spirited away in order to prevent any interference with the progress of his plans at the Grange.

Oh! how bitterly did I repent having kept to myself all my suspicions concerning him! Would that I had revealed them in time to Mrs. Kingston! It was that extreme delicacy of conduct on my part which had perhaps led to my present misfortune—or rather had left me an easy prey to the snare laid to entrap me. What could I do? I knew the Bulldog and Sawbridge too well to flatter myself for a moment that they would leave open the slightest avenue of escape: I felt assured that to whatever destination I was being borne, they would take very good care not to pass through any town or village where my screams might summon persons to my aid. It was useless therefore to cry out—useless to think of making any attempt at escape

from this cart. I felt my fortitude giving way; and for a moment I wrung my hands in despair. But the jolting of the vehicle had become intolerable: I already felt bruised all over; and I was compelled to raise myself up to a less uncomfortable position.

"Hullo! you've come round agin, have you?" growled the Bulldog, turning his head towards me. "Well, you had better be quiet, I can tell you: for me and Nick don't mean to stand no nonsense whatsoever. You've got a jolly long ride before you: but as you see, we've got a spanking horse to do it with—and though it's four-and-twenty mile, yet I think we shall manage it without much stopping."

Four-and-twenty miles! this was at once a clue to my destination: it was the distance between Deal and Ashford, journeying straight and not taking Canterbury in the way;—and so I supposed that the vehicle was being driven by the lanes and cross-roads towards my native town, with all of which short cuts and bye-ways the Bulldog and Sawbridge were no doubt familiar enough. But why was I being conducted to Ashford? Oh! with how dread a shudder did I think of the possibility that it was destined for me to be imprisoned in the den which belonged to these ruffians in that town. I supposed that the affair of robbing Mrs. Whitfield's empty house and their escape from the officers of justice, was looked upon as having blown over, and they no longer feared to make their sinister appearance in Ashford again. But the idea of being held captive in their abode—Oh! it was indeed enough to make my blood run cold and fill me with an unspenkable loathing! The reader perhaps has not forgotten that the place alluded to was a dilapidated old house in the neighbourhood of Ashford churchyard—that it had once been a baker's, but that the oven had subsequently been used by the Bulldog and Sawbridge to bake the abominations they sold to the coffee-dealers. But that was not all the use to which the wretches had put their habitation: for they had been wont to boil down horse-flesh for cat's-meat-men; and if it were to this horrible den that I was to be conveyed, how should I ever support a day's existence there, much less a captivity for any length of time? My thoughts were horrible. It was not merely the idea of prisonage in that place which tortured me, but also the dread of the infamous conduct to which I might be subjected by those remorseless ruffians. Oh! I dared not reflect any longer: the power of thought itself recoiled from its progress along such a vista of appalling subjects.

At the expiration of about an hour from the time that I awoke to consciousness in the cart, it stopped at a short distance from a little ale-house; for I could just distinguish the sign projecting from the front. The Bulldog took the reins while Sawbridge got down, and entered the place: but he speedily came out again with a pail of water and some hay wherewith to refresh the horse. He also brought provender in the shape of bread and cheese and ale for himself and the Bulldog. They offered me some of their food: but I gave them no answer—whereupon the Bulldog told me with a savage growl that I was "a sullen wretch," and then took no farther notice of me. Our halt at this place lasted about a quarter of an hour, at the expiration

of which the journey was resumed. There was another halt presently made for the sake of resting the horse; and afterwards the journey was pursued without farther interruption, till the lights of a town were seen in the distance. I felt assured that it was Ashford, but could not be certain, as the way which we had come was totally unknown to me. But all doubt was speedily cleared up as the well-known bell from the church-tower of my native place rang out the hour of the night. I counted the strokes: it was eleven o'clock. Oh! what would my mistress think? what was now being said at the Grange? What surmises must have been made when Luke returned without me! Would it occur to anybody there that I was the victim of treachery? or would it be supposed that I had wilfully absconded? Good heavens! how can I describe the feelings which I experienced as I put all these questions to myself? But William and Jane—what would they also think? would they not suppose that something horrible had happened to me—that I had been made away with—or by some accident had perished miserably? and how boundless would be their grief! Again was thought itself a rending agony. To be torn from a comfortable home—to be snatched away from the circle of those who were kind to me, and fall thus into the power of remorseless ruffians—it was almost more than I could endure. I wrung my hands in bitterness: I felt as if I were going mad!

My worst fears were confirmed: the house of these dreadful men was to be my destination—for the cart stopped at a short distance therefrom. Dark though it still was, I could nevertheless recognize several features of the spot that were familiar to me: it was just upon the outskirts of the town, in the vicinage of the churchyard—and there were two or three buildings that I at once knew. Now or never to raise my voice and scream for assistance! But this resource—the only one that hope suggested—was quickly anticipated by the Bulldog: for when the cart stopped, and just as I began to lean forward and look around me, he said, "Now you mustn't think of coming any of your nonsense in the hope of getting away from us; because you won't. You will step quietly out and walk with me a little way, while Nick puts up the cart. I've got a pistol in my hand; and I shall hold it close by your head. At the very first sound that comes from your lips, I shall dash your brains out with the butt-end: so your first cry would be your last. Now you know: and I must leave you to decide whether you mean to keep alive or be made a croaker this very night."

"No, no," I answered, "I will not cry out:—for I was overwhelmed with terror at the hideous threats thus uttered by one whom I knew to be so fully capable of carrying them into execution. Mechanically did I descend from the vehicle; for I had scarcely power any longer to act spontaneously: my thoughts were in a state of mingled bewilderment and consternation. The moment my feet touched the ground, the Bulldog grasped my arm with his left hand, and with his right he touched my bonnet rudely with the pistol, to make me aware that it was no idle menace which he had put forth. I walked on as if under the influence of a hideous night-mare dream. A dark alley led up to the door of the dilapidated building, which was all blackened



with the dense smoke that the chimney had been wont to vomit forth in those times when the two ruffians pursued their disgusting avocations with horseflesh ere they took to more desperate courses. But when we reached that door, and the Bulldog knocked three times with the butt-end of his pistol, I shrank back with uncontrollable horror, murmuring, "No, no—for God's sake don't take me here!"

"Silence!" growled the Bulldog: and then with terrible imprecations he said, "You had better hold your tongue and come in quietly. No harm is to be done to you: we don't mean to murder you:"—and he chuckled hideously as if he had just given utterance to an excellent joke.

But I groaned in the bitterness of my spirit: for that very assurance seemed to prove that the wretch would not hesitate to commit murder if it suited his purpose—and how did I know what he might sooner or later be bribed to do? The affair of Shakspeare's

Cliff with all its attendant horrors swept vividly back to my mind, making me most agonizingly aware how capable the monster was of the very blackest iniquity.

The door was opened. For a single instant a scream wavered upon my lips; but I felt the Bulldog's pistol press hard against my bonnet, as if he thought that this warning was necessary to secure my silence until the last;—and the next moment it was too late to scream, for I was borne over the threshold into the dwelling. A woman stood in the passage with a light in her hand; and notwithstanding she was much altered since I had seen her two years back, yet I had no difficulty in recognizing Anne, the servant-woman at the cottage where I was imprisoned under the charge of Mrs. Ferguson in Derbyshire.

Yes—altered she was indeed. She was then somewhat good-looking, very respectable in appearance, and with a discreetness of look that would

have thrown the most wary and suspicious off all guard. Now she was a dirty, slatternly, brazen-faced wretch, with the evidences of debauchery and profligacy hanging about her as palpably as loathsome rags hang on the squalid form of the vagrant. Her countenance was bloated, red, and blotched; her hair was all bushy as if it had not been smoothed down for a week, nor had a comb passed through it for a month: a soiled, torn, and faded cotton gown hung loosely upon her form; and a miserable little shawl neckerchief was thrown over her shoulders. Utter degradation was stamped upon her. Bad as she might have been, and as she really was at the time when I first knew her, she nevertheless was neither a drunkard, nor shameless and brazen-faced; but now the fiend of intemperance had affixed its indelible brand upon her—and so fallen, so sunken had she become, that she no longer thought it worth her while to veil the hideousness of her character beneath a gloss of hypocrisy.

She not only immediately recognized me, but showed no astonishment to see me there, and was therefore doubtless prepared for my arrival. The smile of recognition which she gave me was a sort of impudent leer,—as much as to say, “So we meet again, eh? I dare say you little expected it.” I said nothing; but shrank with a horror which I could not conceal, much less subdue, from the impudent gaze of that sottish-looking mass of depravity.

“There now—walk in,” said the Bulldog in his rough brutal voice. “Nan will make you comfortable. She’s Mrs. Sawbridge now:”—and then he gave vent to a prolonged laugh, hoarse, deep, and rough, as if it were a capital joke.

“Yes, walk in, Miss Price,” said the woman: “for so I suppose I must call your sweet ladyship. What a handsome creature you have grown, although you are so pale and miserable-looking at this moment! Why, you are quite a tall girl, and finely made too—what’s called a full-grown young woman:”—and then she also laughed in the hoarse tones of a voice which was altered by intemperance and depravity as much as her person.

I was conducted into a small low-roofed room, the walls of which were blackened with grime, and the boards of the bare floor equally dark in their unwashed condition. A crazy table—a few rickety rush-bottomed chairs—a cupboard, the door of which hung only by the bottom hinge, disclosing some articles of crockery and of food upon the shelves—an old Dutch clock with a cracked face—and one or two other things, composed the furniture of this wretched place. There was however an immense fire blazing in the grate; and the warmth was at least agreeable—for I was nearly perished with the cold. A kettle was hissing upon the hob, and a half-emptied glass of brandy-and-water on the table showed for what purpose Anne had kept it boiling. Indeed, there was a strong smell of spirits in the place; and the woman’s appearance showed that she had been partaking pretty freely of the alcoholic mixture. The window to this room was small and looked upon the alley whence the front door itself opened: it had now a shutter up, but not a morsel of drapery of any kind either as ornament or screen. I cannot say that my heart sank within me as I glanced around this den, because it had already sunk so low as to be scarcely susceptible of any deeper despondency: but I could not help giving

vent to my feelings by falling upon a seat and burst. ing into tears.

“Now you can leave off whimpering as soon as you like,” said the Bulldog; “for you have no call to make yourself miserable. We ain’t acting for ourselves in this business; and therefore we obey instructions—which is that you are to be kept here for some short time, but not to be hurt. So—now you know.”

If there had been any doubt in my mind as to the source of my present calamity, the Bulldog’s words would have at once cleared it up. Yes—it was but too evident: the villain Charles Leroux was now the Marquis Visconti—and, O heavens! the beautiful, the accomplished, the generous-hearted, and the wealthy Laura Maitland was to become the victim of a galley-slave! Nothing could be plainer: the whole plan was intelligible enough in the intensity of its wickedness. I was to be kept in strict confinement until the marriage should have taken place, when the false Marquis no doubt calculated that in order to avoid the terrific scandal and blighting shame of full exposure to the world, his victim and her friends would consent to any pecuniary compromise to induce the adventurer to separate from her for ever.

All these reflections swept through my brain in a moment; and I almost lost the sense of my own dreadful position in the shuddering contemplation of the horrible destiny which appeared to be in store for an excellent and noble-minded young lady.

The woman Anne made haste to spread a dirty napkin upon the table, and placed thereon some cold meat, bread and cheese, and what appeared to be the remnants of a large pie. By the time these preparations were made, a knock was heard at the door—or rather three distinct knocks, which were evidently the accustomed signal; and the Bulldog, answering the summons, gave admittance to his colleague Sawbridge. The two men and the woman then sat down to table, inviting me to join them: but I gave them no answer. The woman—whom I may as well term Mrs. Sawbridge, for so she was now styled—observed “that I was proud, and would not eat with them;” whereupon Sawbridge himself said that if I chose to have my meals apart, he could see no objection. I said that I required nothing at present, but that I was very unwell and would like to retire to whatsoever chamber I was to occupy. Thereupon the woman lighted another candle, and conducted me up a narrow, rickety, and dirty staircase, to a little chamber only just large enough to contain a bedstead and a washing-stand: but it was certainly some consolation to observe that it wore an air of both comfort and cleanliness, which though far from unexceptionable, still presented a favourable contrast to the room down stairs.

“There,” said Mrs. Sawbridge, as she placed the candle upon the only chair that there was in the chamber, “you can’t complain of your quarters. I had a woman to clean the place out and make it tidy. But you mustn’t think of escaping; because if you try to get out of that window you will tumble into a water-tank and be drowned; and even if you escaped the tank, you would be torn to pieces by the bulldog. I don’t mean Ben,” she added with a coarse laugh; “but that brute you hear now.”

As the woman spoke, the deep growling of a dog

beneath the window did indeed reach my ears; and it was not difficult to tell that the animal was of a savage character enough. I felt wretched beyond all description—so wretched indeed that hopeless though it were, I nevertheless fixed an appealing look upon Mrs. Sawbridge: but she seemed not to notice it, and with an abrupt "Good night," left the room. A heavy bolt drawn outside, a key turning in the lock and then withdrawn, convinced me that I was indeed a prisoner; and the instant I found myself alone, I sank upon my knees, mingling my sobs, my tears, my lamentations, and my prayers.

CHAPTER XCIV.

CAPTIVITY.

I HAD slept soundly from sheer exhaustion; but when the misty glimmering of the dawn of a cheerless January morning crept through the little window into the chamber, I could not for a few moments, on awaking, convince myself that the incidents of the past night were a reality. When however the conviction that it was so, established itself in my mind, all that sense of utter wretchedness which I had experienced ere closing my eyes in slumber, came back upon me; and pressing my hands in despair to my throbbing temples, I gave way to a fresh outburst of grief. All in a moment a strange recollection flashed to my mind. The reader will perhaps remember that one night when I slept at the *George and Blue Boar* in London, I was troubled with fearful dreams, after having seen the ghastly form of him whom I believed to be my own father at the Gipsy Queen's house in St. Giles's. One of those dreams was to the effect that I was being forced by Sawbridge and the Bulldog into their vile den at Ashford. Here indeed I now was: that dream had been fulfilled to the very letter. Oh, too faithful, too painful fulfilment! But was it indeed possible, then, that the future events in the life of an individual could be foreshadowed in dreams?—that the veil which screens events yet unborn may be drawn aside now and then for a single moment, to afford a glimpse of some particular phase through which the individual is hereafter to pass? If this were not the case, then was the coincidence at least extraordinary; and as I pondered upon the circumstance, it filled me with a kind of mysterious awe. The recollection of that dream, the consciousness of its present fulfilment, and the solemn sensation which was thus shed upon me, were not without their useful effects. The violence of my anguish subsided as it were beneath the influence of this grave and religious feeling, so that I was enabled, if not exactly to take courage, at all events to summon as much fortitude as I could call up to my aid.

There were at least some little cheering circumstances which had transpired. It did not appear that I was to be treated with any unnecessary harshness or cruelty; and the presence of a female in the house, even though of so pitiless a disposition and dissolute a character as Anne, was at least some guarantee against outrage. Moreover, my life was evidently safe: I had no longer any fear on this score; and the fact that some lit-

tle preparation had been made to render me as comfortable as the wretchedness of the establishment would permit, tended to corroborate what the Bulldog had told me—namely, that a mere temporary captivity was intended until there should no longer be a necessity for keeping me a prisoner. On my own personal account I therefore had much to reassure me: but then, what frightful mischief would be consummated elsewhere, unless I made my escape to unmask the villain in time to prevent his crowning success! Yes—I must escape. Ah! that word *escape*—is it not always the first that suggests itself to the mind of the captive?

Escape? Yes—but how? I proceeded to examine the premises from the little window of the chamber. This window looked upon a small yard at the back of the house. On my left hand, as I stood at that window, was the high dead wall of an adjoining house, which I knew to have been shut up for years. Facing the window was a low building with a slanting roof, and a high chimney: that was the place containing the oven in which the Bulldog and Sawbridge used to bake their abominations for the coffee-dealers' use. A high wall, covered with broken bottles, closed the extremity of the yard on my right hand; and I knew that beyond this wall there was a wide deep ditch, serving as the common sewer for all the houses that stood near it. In the yard itself I now beheld a bulldog of the most ferocious kind—an animal that seemed quite capable of tearing any intruder down in a moment. Opening the window, I looked out, and saw a large open tank, or well, immediately beneath. Closing the window again, I sat down in despondency—almost in despair,—saying to myself, "No, there is not the slightest possibility of escape!"

And yet I did not now abandon myself altogether to despair: and involuntarily the various miraculous escapes which I had experienced during my life came back to my mind. Could anything be more providentially marvellous than my escape from a horrible death on Shakspeare's Cliff? When I penetrated into the heart of St. Giles's to recover the stolen Isabella Clementina, had I not then escaped the dangers of my enterprise in a signal manner? Again, when a captive at the cottage in Derbyshire, and to all appearances hopelessly in the power of Sir Aubrey Clavering, had not circumstances combined to effect my release? With all these marked interpositions of Divine supervision—for I could regard them in no other light—before my eyes, was I now to abandon myself to despair? No: besides, it was not in my nature to sink down beneath the crushing weight of misfortune, without a single effort to cast it off. Therefore, although after the first survey of the premises from my window I could see no possible avenue of escape, I did not resign myself to a despair that was to experience no change or mitigation.

Mrs. Sawbridge came up to the room and asked me whether I chose to join her down stairs, or take my meals up there? She added that the Bulldog had started off early upon some business, and that she and Sawbridge were alone. It instantaneously struck me that the Bulldog had gone back to Deal to communicate to his employers the success of his enterprise, and perhaps receive a farther instalment of the stipulated reward. Had he still been in the house I should have at

once refused to leave my chamber: for my aversion to that man transcended the abhorrence which I entertained for his companion Sawbridge. I looked upon the latter more as a tool and instrument of the greater and more consummate villain; and I was less afraid of the one than the other, though hating and detesting both. Still, as a matter of course, I should have refused to place myself in a position to meet Sawbridge more than was necessary; and I was about to say that I should prefer keeping to my own room, when it suddenly occurred to me that it would be as well to glean a better idea of the house than I had been able to obtain when first entering it. I therefore said I would go down stairs; and the woman at once made way for me to pass, she herself following me close.

Descending the rickety staircase, the glance that I threw at the house-door showed me that it was of great strength, secured by a chain and two enormous bolts, doubtless for the purpose of resisting in case of need any hostile incursion from without;—and that it was locked to prevent my escape, I could not but conclude. I entered the room on the ground floor to which I was first introduced on my arrival. Sawbridge was seated at breakfast; and in a familiar tone he wished me “good morning.” I made no answer, but sat down. The shutter was now opened, and a dingy piece of muslin was fastened by pins across the lower panes of the window, so that no one passing along the alley could see into the room. Mrs. Sawbridge, pointing to the things upon the table, told me to help myself. I longed to take some tea; but my whole being revolted from touching a cup which had perhaps been used by the horrible characters to whom the house belonged. I likewise felt a craving for food; and Oh! how welcome would a comfortable meal of tea and bread-and-butter have been at that moment! I could not immediately avail myself of the woman’s invitation; and she, comprehending what was passing in my mind, said in a sullen tone, “If you think the cups are poisoned, you had better wash one out for yourself.”

Indifferent as to giving offence, I at once adopted the hint; and taking a cup and saucer to the fireplace, poured over them some boiling water from the kettle. I then made myself some tea, and taking up an uncut loaf, removed the top and cut myself a slice from the inside. Still, as I eat and drank, it was with a deep loathing; but nature compelled me to take sustenance.

When the meal was over, I looked about the room; and then turning to the woman, said, “I suppose that you have no books you can lend me to read.” She rose from her chair and took three or four greasy, dogs-eared, torn volumes from the cupboard. I glanced at the title-pages, and found that they were romances of the Minerva Press: I returned them to her, declaring that I could not read them.

“Come, Nan, we don’t want to be hard upon the poor gal,” observed Sawbridge; “and as you must go out to get her some things, you may as well bring her a few books from the library at the same time.”

Anne said that she had no objection, and quitted the room for a few minutes. Sawbridge now approached the fire to light his pipe. I remained in my chair, gazing listlessly towards the window

thinking of a thousand painful subjects. Suddenly one of the pins which held up the corner of the dirty muslin blind, gave way—and the blind fell. At that very instant some one was passing in the alley: the individual glanced into the room—and an ejaculation of joy and hope rose to the very tip of my tongue, as I recognized Mad Tommy. But fortunately I had presence of mind sufficient to call back that cry before it was uttered. Mad Tommy had not failed to recognize me; and an expression of infinite amazement appeared upon his features. With the rapidity of lightning did I make a sign towards Sawbridge, who was stooping down at the fire; and then I clasped my hands imploringly. Mad Tommy gave a significant nod and gesture, and the next moment disappeared from my view. Oh, how warm was the gush of hope’s resuscitated feelings through my heart!—and if Sawbridge had only turned round an instant sooner than he did, he must have seen that same animation in my countenance. But fortunately his tobacco was somewhat obstinate in lighting to his fancy; and thus by the time he did look round again, I had composed my features and was sitting in a mood of apparent abstraction with my eyes fixed upon the floor.

“Hullo! by goles, there’s the blind down!” he exclaimed: and rushing to the window, he picked up the pin and hastened to fasten up the dingy muslin again. “It isn’t for myself that I’m afraid,” he said, turning towards me with a significant leer, as much as to imply that it was to prevent me myself from being recognized by any passers-by that he had just put up the blind again. “That little affair of the Bulldog’s and mine about Mrs. Whitfield’s house has all blown over now. The lawyer’s dead—and Collins is dead—and there’s nobody to prosecute—and so the whole affair is done and ended. I suppose you knowed that me and the Bulldog on that occasion got clear off at last?—but we had a battle with the constables, though, for it; and it wasn’t till t’other day that we heard of them constables having got themselves into some trouble and been transported; so that what with the death of some parties and the lagging of others, there’s nobody left to do us a mischief in that respect. By the bye, at first we thought it was you that gived the information after we had let you and your sister Sairey go that night: but the constables told us,—that was before we attacked them,—that it was some gentlemen coming home from a party which saw the lights in the winders. I must say, Mary, that though you have somehow or another been mixed up as a marplot in many things which me and the Bulldog has had in hand, you’ve never gone out of your way to do us a mischief; and that’s the reason we don’t treat you very cruel now. I say though, wasn’t it a rum go that you should have been in the coach that time going to Deal?”

“Ah!” said I; “and you know not the dreadful misery and privations that I and my poor sister had to endure in consequence of our loss on that occasion. But yet we did not give any information that might lead to your arrest—”

“But it wasn’t through any love for us,” said Sawbridge, laughing.

“Not for a moment do I wish you to misunderstand the cause of my forbearance. It was nothing but fear.”

“Ah! you know that we are not chaps to be

trified with," observed Sawbridge. "But still you are a good gal for having kept a still tongue in your head on that occasion."

"Now, if you think so," said I, "wherefore do you persecute me at present? Why should you constantly make me the victim of your misdeeds?"

"Why should you be constantly poking your nose in places where you oughtn't?"

"Was it my fault," I asked, looking very hard at Sawbridge as I spoke, "that I should have obtained a good situation at Kingston Grange? or that the Count de Montville should have come thither under the disguise of the Marquis Visconti?"

Sawbridge laughed—turned away—and said nothing—but continued to smoke his pipe. From this little incident I obtained another corroboration of my belief as to the identity of the unprincipled adventurer, and likewise of his being the author of my present captivity.

The woman Anne now returned to the room, dressed in an old cloak and bonnet, and looking the picture of squalor, degradation, and infamy. She had a large market-basket on her arm; and said to me, "Now I am going out to buy things. What can I get for you? If you have any money of your own and want to spend it, I will lay it out for you. You needn't be afraid that I shall rob you."

"No," observed Sawbridge: "we won't do that this time—'cause why, we are well enough paid in another way."

I took out my purse, which contained three sovereigns, besides a little silver; and giving some money to Mrs. Sawbridge, I specified various articles that I wanted,—such as a comb, hairbrush, and toothbrush; some linen, needles, and thread; and some books from the circulating library, a list of which latter I wrote down for her. Then, as she was leaving the room, I asked her as a favour to buy me some tea and sugar, some eggs, bread, and some other things, that I might have exclusively for my own use; and seeing that she assented, I even went so far as to beg that she would trouble herself to buy me a plate, cup and saucer, a common teapot, a knife and fork, and one or two other articles, so that I might be enabled to prepare my own meals. She gave a sneering laugh, but made no particular comment, and promised to comply with my various requests.

As she issued from the house, I ascended to the little chamber which I was compelled to call my own. A bright ray of hope had glamed in upon me. I knew that the poor idiot young man would not be idle; but I cannot say that I expected immediate succour. I knew him too well to buoy myself up with the idea that he would adopt the intelligent and direct course of proceeding straight to a justice of the peace and giving the requisite information. I was well aware that poor Tommy would go a round-about way to accomplish his purpose: but I was equally well convinced that his plans would not be laid without due cunning, and that he would persevere till he had effected them. Oh! it was cheering indeed to entertain the conviction that there was at least one friendly-disposed person outside the walls of this hideous place, who knew that I was a captive there. And here let me observe that the various commissions I had given Mrs. Sawbridge, were as much for the purpose of lulling her and her companions into the belief that I

resigned myself to a captivity of some weeks, as to minister to my own individual comforts.

In about an hour the woman returned, having fulfilled all her errands, but looking very much as if she had stopped at more than one public-house during her walk to obtain refreshment. For a moment I had a great mind to ask how it was that she had become so closely connected with the villains Sawbridge and the Bulldog: but I checked the question ere uttered, recoiling beforehand from a tale of the downward course of guilt and depravity—even supposing that the wretched creature thought fit to be communicative at all.

When she had left me, I arranged all my little articles that she had purchased, and gladly availed myself of the materials for personal cleanliness that I had thus procured. I next examined the books, and found that they were those I had selected. Then I sat down to work, to make myself a requisite change of linen. I sat upon the bed, which was in such a position in respect to the window that from the point where I was placed I could command a view of a portion of that high wall covered with broken glass which overlooked the ditch on the other side. I had been working for perhaps an hour, struggling at the same time against my unpleasant thoughts, and every now and then surprised by a tear-drop falling upon the linen I was sewing,—when I happened to raise my eyes, and it was with a start that I beheld a countenance looking over that wall. It was Mad Tommy. I sprang to the window—he saw me—nodded a sign of intelligence—and then immediately disappeared. How he had raised himself up, and whether when thus vanishing from my sight he had fallen into the ditch, I could not conjecture. But that he knew well what he was doing, and had taken care of himself, I had no doubt: for, as the reader has before seen, there was an extraordinary degree of sharpness about him in one sense, although his intellects were so blunted in another. That he had come to take a survey of the premises, was evident enough: and my previous conjecture was confirmed, that instead of adopting the most direct and the promptest way to emancipate me, he would pursue a round-about course of effecting an escape by cunning and stealthy means. Nevertheless, it was evident he was on the alert; and the lamp of hope burnt with a yet stronger light in the sanctuary of my soul.

I must observe, that so soon as I had caught sight of Mad Tommy, as just described, the dog in the yard set up a loud and ferocious barking. I heard a rush of steps below, and then Sawbridge's voice in the yard, exclaiming, "What could Griper be barking at?"

I had retreated from the window, and had resumed my seat upon the bed: but I heard the dog continue to send forth a series of low savage growls, as if in his instinct he knew that something inimical to the interest of his masters had been portended. Sawbridge remained talking to the animal for a time; and then I heard a door open in the building opposite, so I concluded that he was searching the open-place to ascertain if there were any cause for Griper's anger.

The remainder of that day passed without any incident worthy of record. I was allowed to go down stairs and prepare my own meals at the fire;

so that what little I did eat I was enabled to partake of with less loathing than I had experienced at the breakfast-table. Those meals, too, I carried up to my own chamber to partake of by myself.

On the following day the Bulldog came back. I heard his gruff brutal voice in the passage below when he arrived; and he spoke as if in excellent spirits—so that I concluded he had been receiving money in reward for the perpetration of the present outrage against myself. At first I trembled lest he should take it into his head to come up to me: but he did not—and when Mrs. Sawbridge came to unlock the door to let me go down stairs and prepare my tea, the Bulldog scarcely spoke a single word. He merely said, “Well, young Miss, so you ain’t dead, I see:”—and then he went on smoking his pipe and drinking from a pewter pot which Sawbridge handed him.

A fortnight passed; and no step was taken towards the accomplishment of my release. I saw Mad Tommy’s countenance no more above the wall, although as I sat at work or reading in the solitude of my chamber, I was constantly raising my eyes in the hope of catching a glimpse of those friendly features above the glass-covered barrier of my prison. Every night, too, when I lay down to rest, I thought to myself, “Surely something will be done ere morning dawns, to release me:”—and I lay awake in anticipation of catching some sound conveyed as a signal that succour was at hand. Then I would at length fall asleep in mental exhaustion, and with the weight of despondency gradually growing heavier upon my soul. The morning would dawn in upon me with its sickly wintry gleams, and nothing had been done! Thus did fourteen wretched, wretched nights pass.

With regard to the days, their routine continued the same as I have already described them. I was wont to descend to the lower room twice each day: namely, to prepare my breakfast and my tea, which were the only two meals I required. I always found either Sawbridge or the Bulldog below: for if one went out, the other staid at home as a guard to prevent my escape. Neither of them spoke much to me—chiefly perhaps because I gave them no answers: but they treated me with no rudeness—indeed with a sort of passive civility. The woman executed my commissions, and did not rob me of the change out of the gold I gave her. Thus did my days pass.

But my position, wretched from the very first, was becoming intolerable. There was a little looking-glass in my chamber; and each morning when I rose, it was with a cruel dread that I ventured to approach it. The closeness of my captivity, united with the continual agitation in which my feelings were kept, was preying upon my health; and as I have before said, my spirits were sinking from despondency into downright despair. I had become very pale—my eyes were sunken—and there were blueish tints in the hollows. What little appetite I had at first, was gone: I subsisted chiefly upon tea: I could not even manage to eat the smallest piece of bread-and-butter, and could only take a morsel of bread by sopping it in my tea. I felt sick at heart and sick at the stomach: there was a blight upon my soul, and a physical nausea which made me recoil from the bare idea of food. To be pent up in that miserably small chamber, was like being in a

living tomb: each day the space seemed narrower, the atmosphere heavier, the shape of the chamber more coffin-like: each day, too, did I experience a greater difficulty in breathing, as if the lungs were contracting, and would soon collapse altogether for want of the expansive agencies of fresh air and good exercise. Thus did the fortnight pass away.

One night I was lying awake as usual, wondering whether the morning would again dawn without seeing anything done towards my deliverance. I had not entirely renounced hope, nor had I for an instant lost my confidence in the friendly disposition of Mad Tommy: I only feared that he had found it impracticable to do anything on my behalf, or else that the ruffians had discovered his purpose and mounted guard by turns during the night outside the walls of their habitation. I was lying awake as usual on this particular night, I say—wondering whether anything favourable would transpire,—when I suddenly heard Griper begin to bark furiously and rush across the yard: but all in a moment his barking ceased—he kept silent for at least a couple of minutes—and then merely gave forth a low continuous subdued growl. But the inmates of the house had been disturbed. A door on the same landing as mine, and where I knew Mr. and Mrs. Sawbridge slept, was thrown open; and this man’s voice was heard vociferating out for Ben the Bulldog. Almost immediately a door below—one, I fancied, facing their usual sitting room—was likewise flung open; and the Bulldog’s voice was heard in reply. Sawbridge now knocked hastily at my door, exclaiming, “I say, young Miss, be you there?”

“I am,” was my immediate answer. “What is the matter?”

“Oh! nothing—it’s all right—go to sleep again:”—and having thus spoken, Sawbridge descended the stairs. I heard him and the Bulldog exchange rapid observations in the passage below, to the effect that one should search the yard and another go and look outside; and then followed the noisy opening of the back and front doors. I heard Sawbridge talk to the dog, saying, “What’s the matter, poor feller? what is it, Griper? Show me, good dog!” But the animal only sustained its low rumbling growl, and barked no more. I heard the door of the oven-place open and presently shut again; and Sawbridge returned into the house about the same time that the Bulldog came back from making his round outside. I likewise heard them say to each other in the passage below, “It’s nothing:”—then wishing each other “good night,” they returned to their chambers, and in a few minutes all was still again, even to the growling of the dog. Soon afterwards the church-clock rang out the midnight hour, the twelve successive metallic strokes booming with sonorous din through the troubled air of a gusty night.

I could not help thinking that it was not a mere false alarm on the part of the dog, but that Mad Tommy had perhaps attempted to scale the wall, but frightened by the animal, had been compelled to retreat. Yet wherefore had Griper so suddenly ceased barking? This at least was strange. That barking had not slowly subsided into a prolonged and gradually diminishing growl, but had stopped short with singular abruptness, leaving an interval of at least a couple of minutes ere the growling

began. I could not understand it; but I felt tolerably certain that this disturbance had been caused by some attempt made on my behalf. One fact of some importance had transpired from the incident: it was that there was no watch kept outside the house, but that the two men slept within doors.

On the following day, the longer I reflected upon the occurrence of the preceding night, the more convinced was I that my conjecture relative to Mad Tommy was the correct one; and I resolved to lie down with my clothes on during the forthcoming night, in case another attempt should be made and that it should succeed, so that I might be prepared for whatever casualty might arise. Wearily and heavily as the time dragged its slow length along from the very first instant of my captivity, yet never perhaps had the hours passed with a foot more truly leaden than they did for the remainder of this day.

But at length the night came; and soon after ten o'clock I heard Sawbridge and the Bulldog make the round of the premises. I had extinguished the candle in my room, and looking forth through the window, saw them by the light of a lantern which one of them carried, enter the oven-place. As they came forth, they looked up at my window: I saw the light of the lantern reflected upon their horrible countenances, to which it gave a ghastly appearance. Did they suspect that I had made any attempt to escape on the previous night? or was it in the mere spirit of the careful survey which they were now making that they thus looked up at the window? I knew not. They did not linger long in the yard, but after caressing the dog, returned into the house; and half-an-hour afterwards I heard them seek their respective rooms. For some time I sat upon the bed listening to catch the slightest sound that might seem fraught with significance for me; and at length I became so wearied, I was compelled to lie down. Although I struggled to keep awake and had such good reasons too for being on the alert, yet drowsiness gradually stole upon me—my thoughts grew indistinct—the images of my mind fell into confusion—and I slept. Suddenly was I startled up by the furious barking of the dog again; and I heard the animal rush across the yard. Again too did the barking cease suddenly; but after a brief interval the animal gave vent to the same kind of subdued growling as on the previous night. Almost immediately afterwards the door of Sawbridge's room opened: the bolts of my door were instantaneously drawn back—the key turned in the lock—and Mrs. Sawbridge, with a candle in her hand, rushed in.

"What's that disturbance?" she cried, fixing her eyes upon me, as I started up from the bed in terror, fancying that it was Sawbridge himself; then as she perceived that I was dressed, her looks grew dark and full of suspicion. But without saying another word, she turned to the window—examined it—saw that it was fastened—saw also that the washing-table which stood against it was in its place;—and thus finding nothing to confirm her suspicions, but quite enough to stifle them, she said, "I'm sorry for having disturbed you. Of course there's no nonsense about the matter: I thought you was trying to escape. But how is it that you have got your clothes on?"

"Because it suits me best to sleep in this way," I answered.

"Oh! you needn't be afraid of anything," she at once replied, interpreting my words in that sense: "no one will come near you. I shouldn't have thought of doing it, if it hadn't been for Griper making a row again. But I suppose after all that it's nothing except the rats."

I made no remark; and the woman retired, locking and bolting the door behind her. I remained listening to hear if Sawbridge and the Bulldog went out on this occasion to see what was the matter: but they did not. The house at once relapsed into its wonted silence; and I accordingly concluded that the two men thought less of the matter this night than they had on the preceding one. But I thought a good deal more: I was convinced that Mad Tommy was at the bottom of it, and that whatever his project might be, it was of a nature requiring some degree of perseverance, which quality he was exemplifying. But as I concluded that nothing more would be done this night, I laid aside my apparel and sought my bed. The church-clock now struck twelve; and I said to myself, "Tomorrow night I shall know at what hour to be on the alert, and I will not suffer myself to be surprised by sleep."

When I descended to the room down stairs to make my breakfast in the morning, Mrs. Sawbridge again said something in the shape of apology for having burst into my chamber during the past night.

"If I could escape, I would," was my answer: "but you must very well know that it were madness to make the attempt with a well open underneath my window, a ferocious dog in the yard, and the almost impossibility of climbing over the walls."

"You are right enough there, Mary Price," said the Bulldog, with a brutal laugh. "I suppose Master Griper is disturbed by the rats, and that's what it is."

"Will you tell me," said I, "how much longer you intend to keep me in this place?"

"Well, to make your mind easy, I don't think, from summit I have heard," remarked the Bulldog, "that you will have more than another week of it at the outside—perhaps only three or four days. Depend upon it we don't want to keep you here longer than we can help: for it chains us down to the spot and interferes with other business we have in hand—don't it, Nick?"

"It do, Ben. But I say," he added, with a coarse chuckle, "show Mary that book Nan bought yesterday."

"Ah! so I will," responded the Bulldog; and he took from the cupboard a volume wrapped up in paper. He handed it to me: but I turned away, refusing to look at it—not knowing but that it might be something improper, with which in a brutal jest he wished to insult me.

"Why, it's the Bible, you silly little fool," said the Bulldog. "Look here—here's the name on the back"

I did glance mechanically towards the volume, and saw that what he said was true. Astonishment seized upon me, but accompanied with a feeling of horror at the idea of such a book being in such hands. Ah! had it been purchased by him in the contrivance of his own guilty soul, how different would the case have been: but not for a single

instant dared I entertain such a hope—for there was a lingering sneer upon the wretch's diabolical countenance.

"You can't guess what this is for," he went on to say. "Well, I will tell you:"—and placing the Bible upon the table, he took from his pocket a long clasp-knife with a buck-horn handle—opened the ghastly dagger-like blade—and laid the weapon by the side of the sacred volume. I gazed upon this proceeding with the same continued feelings of astonishment and horror: I could not possibly conjecture what the man's meaning was. Unconsciously did I glance towards Sawbridge and Anne; and I beheld on their countenances the same kind of sardonic sneer as there was on that of the Bulldog, though perhaps less hideous in its expression.

"Now, Mary Price," said the last-mentioned ruffian, "we know that you are a very pious, religious, good kind of a gal, and that you believe in this here book. Well, when the time comes—which it will now in a few days—for you to go about your business, them's the alternatives. Ah! I see you don't understand me yet. Well then, what I mean is, that you will either take a hoath upon that Bible never to betray to a single living soul what has become of you during the three weeks you will have been here—or else you will have that there knife drawn bang across your pretty white throat."

I shuddered from head to foot with a cold and visible tremor; and the word "Monster!" was on the tip of my tongue: but I was instantaneously struck with the impolicy of giving vent to the feelings which had been conjured up within me by this horrible menace—and saying nothing, I hastened from the room. The woman followed me up as usual to lock me in my own chamber; and when I was once more alone there, I sat down, leaving my breakfast untasted, and gave way to my reflections.

In a week, then—perhaps in a few days—the treachery would be consummated, and Laura Maitland made the victim of a branded adventurer! No doubt the false Marquis had succeeded by some specious pretences in accelerating the wedding-day; and the confiding, generous-hearted Laura had not turned a deaf ear to his request. Oh! to save her—to save her! Just heaven, to save her—and to prevent the accomplishment of this hideous treachery! But how was it to be managed? Oh! never was Bastille or well-guarded fortalice better calculated to bar all hope of escape than the den in which I was imprisoned: never were armed sentinels or vigilant warders more difficult to elude than the wretches who had me in their power! But there was yet time to act if Mad Tommy were really engaged in my service, and if he were persevering in whatsoever scheme he had in view. How anxiously did I await the coming night: but how slowly passed the hours! I tried to read—I tried to work—but could do neither. I was whirled round like a feather upon a troubled sea of suspense, hope, terror, expectation, and apprehension. But, Oh! to save Laura Maitland! Heavens, was that charming creature to fall into the abyss?

The evening began to draw its dusky veil over the face of nature, and darkness soon set in. At length the church-clock struck ten. Soon afterwards the Bulldog and Sawbridge went the round

of the premises with their lantern; and in another half-hour they retired to their rooms. I resolved not to lie down, for fear of being overtaken by slumber: so I sat up, anxiously listening for any sound that might seem to herald the hope of escape. But how was it possible that Tommy could accomplish this? how was he to scale the wall? how was the dog to be disposed of? how was I to be assisted to descend from the chamber? and even if I got into the yard, how was I to get out of the premises? I knew not: I dared not raise conjectures against these numerous barriers, because they seemed insurmountable;—and yet I had a presentient faith in Mad Tommy's sharpness and ingenuity.

The church-clock was proclaiming the hour of midnight; and as nothing had as yet taken place, I began to despair,—when as the last stroke of Time's iron tongue rolled booming through the leaden atmosphere—for the night was nearly quite dark—the sudden barking of Griper rose as before. I heard him rush across the yard: the barking ceased: then I distinctly heard something fall upon the pavement below—and after several minutes had elapsed, no growling was heard. All was still: the wretches inside the house did not this time leave their beds. But was anything more to happen? Half-an-hour passed, and all continued still. Then the night's incident was over? But if Tommy were really doing anything on my behalf, was it to be confined to this repetition of scenes with the dog? Ah! a thought struck me. The dog was the principal barrier in his way; and he was doubtless taking some means to reduce it to submission. But at all events it seemed clear that nothing more was to be done this night; and when the clock struck one, I retired to rest.

The next day was a longer and more weary one than any I had yet passed. I was martyred upon the sharp points of suspense. A nervous irritability came upon me; and at one time I found myself tossing the things about in my room as if to vent a spite upon those inanimate objects. Ashamed of myself for this conduct, I exercised a firmer control over my feelings: but I could not conceal from myself that three or four days more of this torturing uncertainty, and three or four more nights of those ineffective incidents, would bring upon me the horrors of an hysterical fever. Though cooped up in that narrow space, and therefore without wear or fear for my physical energies, the activity of my mind was destroying me. Therefore fervently—Oh! how fervently, did I pray that the coming night should not pass without some more intelligible development of Mad Tommy's plan—if he one.

The weather had undergone a change; and after more than a fortnight's gloomy days and starless nights, the sky became clear—the sun shone—and I really hailed its beams as a cheering omen in respect to my own hopes and wishes. Evening came; and when night set in, the deep blue canopy of heaven was lighted up with its myriad twinkling lamps. The moon came out in her silver splendour; and the stars seemed to shine with even a more than wonted lustre, as if in compliment to the fair Queen of Heaven. Oh! how the illimitable galaxy of lights above makes the puny illuminations of the stateliest palaces and most spacious pleasure-grounds of man dwindle down into utter insignificance!



But the feeling of pleasure and of hope which the presence of the heavenly host of moon and stars for a time caused me to experience, became suddenly damped by the reflection that it was not on such a night as this that an escape could be safely attempted: and when once I fell into a melancholy mood, other desponding thoughts soon followed in rapid succession. What if, after all, I had been cherishing a delusion?—that Mad Tommy was doing nothing for me—and that for several of the past nights the dog had been merely hunting vermin, and so suddenly ceased barking at the instant he seized upon his prey? Oh! with what despair did this reflection smite my soul! Instinctively I looked through the window to see if I could catch sight of the dog and ascertain what he was doing. The yard was almost as light as day with the flood of argentine lustre streaming down into it; and I beheld the dog standing at the foot of the wall covered

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with the broken bottles. The animal was standing perfectly still: it looked like an effigy instead of the living brute;—but as I continued to gaze, I saw that it was actually looking upward to the top of the wall—and in that position did it keep its head fixed. I felt persuaded that the animal in the keenness of its instinct was expecting something that had happened before; so I watched the dog and the wall as intently as the dog was watching the wall itself. In a few minutes the animal began moving about—turning to and fro in a short space, and wagging its tale as if pleased: then it stopped short, and looked up to the wall again. In all this I recognized some development of the animal's sagacity or instinct. Suddenly I heard something drop—just the same sound as had caught my ear on the previous night. This time there was no barking or growling at all; but the animal sprang at something on the pavement and appeared to be eat-

ing. As I was still keeping my eyes fixed in that direction, I saw an object rise above the level of the wall; then something else was thrown over—Griper flew to it—and now I could distinctly see that he was really devouring the object.

It was a human form which was gradually raising itself above the wall—Oh! how quickly beat my heart! Methought that I recognized Mad Tommy; and I strained my eyes to clear myself of doubt. He now seemed to be placing something like a sack, or rug, or mat, over the top of the wall. It immediately struck me that he purported a descent into the yard, and that this was to prevent himself from being cut by the glass. But now something more was thrown over the wall; and again the dog approached it—but not with the same voracious rush as before. It instantaneously occurred to me that if this were really Mad Tommy, and if he were working for my rescue, I ought to give him some signal that I was on the alert. With infinite caution did I remove the washing-table from the window; and with unabated carefulness did I open the window itself. Then I waved my white handkerchief, and the person on the wall took off his cap and responded to my signal. The moonlight, now streaming full upon his countenance, showed me that it was indeed my faithful friend Mad Tommy. But the dog—I looked to see what the animal was doing: it lay motionless upon the pavement. The truth flashed to my comprehension: the meat which Tommy had thrown over to it, contained an active rapid poison—and the formidable guardian of the place was dead.

I now saw Tommy rapidly lowering a rope-ladder into the yard as he sat astride upon the wall. This was speedily done; and he commenced his descent. In a few moments he was in the yard. Oh! if the inmates of the house should happen to entertain any suspicion of what was going on, the life of this poor faithful creature would be sacrificed to their fury. My blood ran cold at the bare idea. But I had not many moments for reflection. Mad Tommy crossed the yard towards the open well beneath my window. He was looking up and making signs to me the whole time. Good heavens! he did not see the well—he did not know that it was there! For me to call out to him, was to risk being overheard in the adjacent room where Sawbridge and the woman slept; and therefore if he escaped drowning in the tank, it would only be to perish by the knife or the pistol of the disturbed miscreants. Nevertheless, at all risks, and leaning half out of the window so that I nearly lost my balance and fell headlong, I said, “Stop—for heaven’s sake stop! There is a well at your feet.”

Another instant and he would have been lost: for it was only on the very brink of the well that he thus halted, and with a sudden recoil stepped back a pace or two. Then he looked up—made me more signs of intelligence—and by his gestures signified that he was going to help me descend: but pointing to the well, he turned away and began looking round the yard in all directions. I watched him with the agony of the most poignant suspense: but to my joy I saw him suddenly bring forth from behind the angle of the oven-place a couple of large planks. These he bore upon his shoulder to the verge of the tank, and placed them across the opening. Getting upon them, he displayed something

which he had hitherto carried under his arm; and unwinding it, showed a rope-ladder. To put on my bonnet and shawl was now the work of a moment; and this being done, I unwound two reels of strong thread—tied the reels themselves to the ends to serve as weights—and lowered them out of the window. Tommy fastened one extremity of the ladder to the threads, which being double were strong enough to hold it. I lost no time in drawing up the end of the rope-ladder, and found that at the extremity of each cord there was an iron grapnel firmly attached. These I at once understood how to fix against the inner ledge of the window-sill, while Mad Tommy held the lower extremity with all his strength as he stood upon the planks across the well.

The critical moment was now come. Oh! was I to escape? It seemed a happiness too great to be trusted in. I paused for a few moments, and listened with breathless attention. All was still inside the house. Then, with fluttering heart I passed myself out of the window; and clinging to the cords, began the descent. Just heaven! at that instant one of the grapnels gave way. I heard the crack of the rotten woodwork—I heard also that the cracking continued; and seized with indescribable horror lest the other should yield also, I slid down the ladder. The force with which I alighted on the planks caused them to bend as if they were breaking under us; and now half dead with affright, I sank down on the pavement in the yard.

“Nothing to fear, Miss Price—nothing to fear,” said poor Tommy, as he bent over me. “All right: the dog dead—and those bad people not disturbed. Sleeping sound: most likely—most likely.”

I rose from the pavement with swimming brain, scarcely able to believe that I was thus far on the road to safety. I seized Tommy by both hands, and pressed them warmly—cordially—fraternally—while the tears of unspeakable gratitude flowed down my cheeks. But Tommy abruptly withdrew his hands, saying in a sort of imploring tone, “Pray don’t stop—pray don’t stop. No time—no time!”—and then he hurried me across the yard to where the other rope-ladder hung from the wall. He planted himself firmly at the bottom of this ladder, and held it about a yard away from the foot of the wall, so that by its slanting position I might the more easily ascend it. As I commenced the ascent, he said in a hurried whisper, “Take care, Miss Price, when you get down on t’other side—narrow plank across the ditch—very deep.”

I threw upon him a look of gratitude, and ascended the rope-ladder as quickly as I could. The dangerous part of this step in the enterprise was on reaching the summit of the wall to turn myself over it, so as to settle myself on the ladder on the outer side. I now perceived that it was an immense thick sack which Mad Tommy had stretched over the wall; and after a great deal of scrambling, and a very narrow escape from being precipitated into the ditch at the bottom, I succeeded in getting upon the exterior ladder. At every downward step that I took, my heart appeared to beat harder and harder. In a few moments my feet touched the plank over the ditch; and crossing it, I stood upon the bank in safety.

Looking up, I saw Tommy appear upon the top of the wall: the ladder was made fast by some

means at the lower extremities—and he also descended in safety. Again did I take his hands and press them warmly: again too did the tears of an ineffable gratitude flow down my cheeks. But he hurried me away from the vicinage of that horrible place; and we passed into the town by a somewhat circuitous route, so as to avoid the alley. The clock now struck one as I halted in the deserted streets of my native place. But, Oh! I was free—I was free; and never did emancipated captive luxuriate in the delicious consciousness of freedom as I luxuriated then. I poured forth my gratitude again and again to my devoted deliverer in all the fervid terms that were consistent with the immensity of the service he had rendered me: but as I surveyed him I saw that he was not the ragged, miserable, wretched object he was wont to be: though poorly he was nevertheless decently dressed, and looked clean and comfortable.

"Miss Price," he said, now speaking with more coherence than was his habit, "you needn't thank me. You always spoke kind words to poor Tommy: poor Tommy would not desert you—not likely, not likely!"—then returning again to the first person in his manner of speech, he went on to observe, "I was sorry to make you wait so long—so many, many days—but couldn't do it before. Had to sit up at night to make the rope-ladders: then had to get the irons made at the blacksmith's: then had to deal with that dog. It took four or five nights to silence him."

"I understand it all now, Tommy," said I. "You found that he barked and growled at first: at last you made him leave off the growling—and then, to-night, he left off the barking."

"Yes—yes: dog knew that his friend with the meat had come—but dog didn't know that the meat of to-night was poisoned, or else he wouldn't have eaten it—not likely, not likely!"—and here Tommy chuckled at his cleverness in over-reaching the dog.

I was in haste to obtain a vehicle and speed to Deal; but I could not help lingering yet a few minutes to converse with my faithful deliverer: and I asked him what he was doing and how he was living?

"Tommy with farmer now," he answered. "Farmer Jackson very good man indeed—very kind to poor Tommy—never beats him—never scolds him. I have plenty to eat and drink—good bed and good clothes: and look here!" he exclaimed, in semi-idiotic glee, as he produced two half-crowns from his pocket: "Tommy got money!"

"Yes," said I; "but Tommy has also spent some of his own money in buying ropes, and irons, and different things to save me from that place; and unless Tommy wants to make me very unhappy indeed, and never let Tommy serve me again, he must take this!"—and suddenly producing a sovereign from my purse, I thrust it into his hand.

"No, no, Miss Price—I don't want it—I can't take it!"—and he endeavoured to force it back upon me.

"Tommy," I said, pretending to be very serious, "if you don't take it, you will make me angry: but what is more, you will make me very unhappy—you will indeed."

"I will buy something to make me think of you," he said: and, though still with reluctance, he kept

the money. "Where is Miss Price going? can I do anything for her?"

"No—nothing, thank you, Tommy. I am going to the *Saracen's Head*, which is close by. And now good night."

"Miss Price mustn't tell any body that Tommy helped her. If the Bulldog and Sawbridge knew that Tommy had done this, they would kill poor Tommy."

"Not for worlds would I endanger you, my good friend. And now once more good night."

Again we shook hands; and he hurried off in one direction, while I proceeded to the *Saracen's Head* inn, which was only a few yards distant from the spot where we had paused to converse. It was some time before I could arouse any one belonging to the establishment: but at length the "boots" opened the door and inquired what I wanted. I said that I must see the landlady of the inn immediately; and knowing her to be a kind motherly woman, I had little hesitation in having her aroused from her bed. The "boots" went to call a chamber-maid that she might summon her mistress; and returning to where he had left me in the hall, he took me into a parlour and lighted a fire. I desired him to bring me some refreshment, for I was very cold and much exhausted: but by the time I had taken a little wine-and-water and a biscuit, I felt considerably better. The landlady now made her appearance; and having known me almost from my childhood, she was very far from displeased at the liberty I had taken in having her called from her bed. The explanations I gave her were necessarily brief and hurried, but sufficient to make her comprehend the urgency of the request which I proffered, that I might have a post-chaise immediately. She accordingly gave the orders; but as the groom and postilion had to be called up, half-an-hour elapsed ere the vehicle was in readiness. During that interval I gave the kind landlady some additional explanations, telling her how the false Count de Montville, who fourteen or fifteen months back had occupied the Willow House, was now endeavouring to entrap another heiress at Deal—how I had reason to know that he had taken measures to precipitate the marriage-day—and thence my determination not to rest until I had reached Kingston Grange, fervently hoping that I might arrive in time to save an amiable young lady from indescribable misery. I likewise told the landlady how for three weeks I had been held close captive in the horrible den kept by the Bulldog and Sawbridge—and how I had managed to escape by climbing over the wall: but I did not mention Mad Tommy's name in connexion with my deliverance. The worthy landlady was shocked and horrified at my tale, and vowed that the moment it was daylight she would send for the constables that the ruffians might be taken into custody. This proceeding I earnestly enjoined her to adopt, as I considered that it would be a crime against society to show any farther forbearance towards those miscreants. Finding too that I was incessantly becoming the object of their persecutions and the victim of their iniquities, I now felt anxious for my own sake that they should be consigned to the grasp of justice and sent to the penal colonies. I therefore told the landlady that if she would write and let me know whether they were arrested, I would come back to

Ashford to give evidence against them: but I expressed my fears that when they found I had escaped, they would fly. To prevent this, the landlady decided upon at once sending for the constables: but as the post-chaise was now in readiness, I could not wait to see the issue. Not having near money enough to pay the expenses of posting, I borrowed what was sufficient from the landlady, and took my seat in the vehicle. The church-clock was striking two as the post-chaise rolled away from the door of the *Saracen's Head*.

It was now while seated in the vehicle and being borne along at a fine pace, that I experienced all the delights of my recovered freedom; and as I looked back upon that three weeks' captivity, it appeared to me even more horrible if possible than its actual experience was at the time, bad though even that was. Oh! now within a few hours I should be enabled to relieve my brother and sister at Deal from the dread suspense in which they no doubt were concerning me; and I fondly hoped that it would not be too late to save Laura Maitland from the snares laid to entrap her. But I will not weary the reader with my thoughts or calculations during my journey. The distance of fourteen miles to Canterbury was accomplished in an hour and a half; and between three and four o'clock I entered the cathedral-city. Here, from some cause which I could not exactly understand, there was an hour's delay in obtaining a change of horses; and it was not until half-past four that the post-chaise started again. The twelve miles to Sandwich were accomplished a little before six; and there was another long halt in procuring a relay. I began to regard these obstacles as ominous, and almost feared that something would yet happen to frustrate the ultimate aim of my journey. When therefore the chaise broke down between Sandwich and Deal, I really felt a superstitious terror seize upon me for a moment, that fortune itself was against me. One of the springs of the chaise had snapped, and half-an-hour was lost by the postilion's endeavour to cobble it up in such a way that it would perform the rest of the journey. But even then he dared not do more than walk his horses lest the jolting of the heavy body of the vehicle upon the lower part of the machinery should cause a complete break-down. Thus it was eight o'clock before I reached Deal. At the inn where the chaise stopped, I immediately ordered a fly to be got ready to take me up to the Grange. I was told that it would be half-an-hour, and therefore lost not a moment in repairing to Mr. Sands' house. At the very instant I came within sight of it, William issued forth from the surgery-door. He gave a wild cry of delight on beholding me; and the next instant we were clasped in each other's arms.

"Oh! dearest, dearest Mary," he exclaimed; "I knew that you would come back! But do tell me, what has happened? for I would not for a moment believe the dreadful tale that reached my ears."

It instantaneously struck me that my enemies, not contented with having adopted the most abhorrent treachery towards me, had superadded some detestable calumny to account for my absence. Such I found to have been the fact. It appeared that the pot-boy at the *King's Head* told Luke when he went back for me according to promise, on the night of my forced abduction, that he need not

have given himself the trouble, for that I had gone away with a young man who pretending to be my brother, had written that note up to the Grange that I might show it to Mrs. Kingston as an excuse for obtaining leave of absence. But William repeated that not for a single moment had he put faith in the calumny, and that he had not mentioned it to Jane at all, nor yet in a letter which he had felt himself bound to write to Sarah respecting my disappearance; but that he had confidently assured them I should return soon and give a satisfactory reason for my absence. I afforded William a few necessary but hurried explanations, and need hardly say that he was inexpressibly indignant as well as afflicted at all I had endured.

"And now tell me, dear William," said I, "what news have you from the Grange? Is the wedding-day fixed?"

"Yes: it is to-day," he replied.

"To-day!" I ejaculated.

"Yes: and Mr. Sands has been gone at least an hour. He was invited——"

"Not another instant can I stay, William. Tell dear Jane that I have come back—lose no time in writing a note to Sarah, and send it off in a parcel by coach, so that she may have it this evening. A letter by post would not reach her till to-morrow. And now good bye for the present."

I sped back to the inn, where I expected the fly to be in readiness: but the persons belonging to the place were not in as great a hurry as myself, and it was a quarter to nine o'clock before it started. The horse was however a good one; and the three miles to the Grange were accomplished in a short half hour. The moment it stopped at the entrance-gate of the park, I said to the porter who looked astonished to see me, "Has the bridal-party set out?"

"Well, you're a pretty young woman, I think," he said, without answering my question, "to cut off in this manner, remain away three weeks, and then come slashing back in a fly——"

"Do not think ill of me," I exclaimed in an excited manner. "I have been purposely carried off by main force——"

"Is this true, though?" said the man, looking very hard at me: "for we were all sorry to hear what we did."

"It is true, as there is a heaven above us. You will know all presently. But for God's sake answer my question. The bridal-party——"

"Has been gone this half-hour to Walmer Church."

"Then away to Walmer Church!" said I, in almost frantic excitement to the driver of the fly.

Off we sped, leaving the astonished porter staring after us. Oh! if I should arrive too late! But even then, such a marriage would be null and void: for the false Marquis was already married to Mr. Appleton's unfortunate niece. Nevertheless, it was expedient, if possible, to anticipate even the solemnization of the ceremony; and I urged the driver with liberal promises to make his horse fly like the wind.

In a few minutes the little spire of the picturesque church of Walmer met my view: the fly dashed up to the gate of the church-yard—I precipitated myself from the vehicle at the risk of breaking my limbs—and with a rapid glance beheld two marriages, the Squire's and the false Marquis's, waiting

close by. Ejaculations of surprise burst from the lips of the coachmen and servants belonging to those equipages: for they immediately recognized me. Some one rushed forward as if to lay hands upon me: it was the Italian valet.

"You mustn't go there," he said, utterly taken off his guard and speaking in excellent English, as he glanced towards the church.

All in a moment did a ray of intelligence flash into my memory; and the sound of the man's voice instantaneously became familiar. I looked at him steadily for an instant—and there was no longer any doubt as to the expression of his countenance, disguised though it were with some dye to tint the complexion. That man was John Wilson, the groom who had so materially aided Mr. Appleton at the time in unmasking the Count de Montville.

"Villain," I said, "I know you:"—and I told him his name.

"Ah! then, it's all dickey," he exclaimed with flippant insolence, and turned away.

I sped onward—entered the churchyard—rushed up to the porch—and was immediately stopped by the sexton and pew-opener.

"There's a marriage going on inside," they said.

"I know it," was my answer; and breaking away from them, I darted into the church with perhaps less ceremony than was consistent with the sanctity of the place, but with an excited haste that was natural enough under the circumstances. The bridal-party was at the altar: half-a-dozen persons, ladies and gentlemen, met my view;—but conspicuous above all, were the bride and bridegroom. The words that the clergyman was uttering at the time reached my ears: at that very instant the question was being put to Laura "whether she would have that man for her husband?"

"No, no!" I screamed forth; and suddenly seized with a sensation of faintness, stopped short and staggered against a pew to save myself from falling.

The confusion and dismay into which the bridal-party were thrown, cannot be described. From what I subsequently heard, the bridegroom on glancing round and beholding me, was struck with absolute horror; and Laura, on perceiving the effect which my wild cry had produced upon her intended husband, was smitten with a presentiment of some terrible evil, and fainted. All in a moment some one rushed madly past me: the incident startled me into vivid consciousness again—it was the bridegroom who thus fled precipitately!

The next moment I was surrounded by the Squire, Mr. Sands, another gentleman, and two ladies, all questioning me as to the meaning of the scene. In a few hurried words I told them the whole truth—that the Marquis Visconti was no Italian at all, a mere French adventurer of the most infamous description, and that I had been spirited away and kept in close captivity in order to prevent me from exposing him. The man's flight was a sufficient corroboration of the painful accuracy of my statements.

Poor Laura Maitland was borne in an unconscious state to the carriage; and on arriving there, we found that the false Marquis and his valet had abruptly taken their departure in the other equipage. But the fly was at hand to convey a portion of the bridal-party back to the Grange.

CHAPTER XCV.

TOM SCUDDER.

Of all sad things which enter into the catalogue of vicissitudes belonging to this world, the saddest perhaps is the spectacle of a bridal-party which had set out in joy and happiness, returning home in affliction and tears. No circumstance of life could more forcibly illustrate the uncertainty of human affairs, or prove how vain are too frequently the fondest hopes and most fervid aspirations of this world's denizens. Such were the morals to be deduced from the painful occurrence which I am now relating; and if in one sense it was a source of satisfaction to myself that I had arrived in time to prevent the sacrifice of a beautiful and excellent young lady to the treachery of a villain, it was on the other hand the source of infinite grief to witness the effect of the stern duty I had accomplished. For Laura Maitland's condition was pitiable indeed. On arriving at the Grange, she was conveyed in a state of stupor to her own chamber: but by the assistance of Mr. Sands, she presently rallied somewhat.

As a matter of course I found myself the centre of all regards—the object of universal interest. Seated in the drawing-room with the bridal-party (the bride and bridegroom however excepted) and the several guests who had been invited to the wedding-breakfast, but who had not accompanied the presumed "happy pair" to the church, I told my narrative. It would be impossible to describe the indignation that prevailed in respect to the French adventurer, or the amount of sympathy that was poured forth on behalf of the unhappy Laura. Nor did those around me fail to offer their condolences for the sufferings I had endured, and their congratulations at my escape,—while they complimented me highly upon my zeal and activity in losing no time in hastening back to Deal. I felt so ill and exhausted that I was soon compelled to retire to my chamber. Mrs. Kingston presently came up, and embracing me, said, "During the whole time of your absence, Mary, I could not bring myself to believe that the tale which Luke brought back was true. I had too high an opinion of you to put faith in it; and I can assure you that in this opinion I was not single—for poor Laura herself was equally incredulous. The Squire, knowing much less of you, was not equally warm in your favour, particularly as he went down to the tavern in the Walmer Road the morning after your disappearance, and questioned the man who had told Luke the story of your flight. Now the Squire is going to send a constable with a warrant to arrest that individual as being a party to your abduction."

I thanked Mrs. Kingston for all the kind things she had said, and inquired if there were any letters for me?—but not one had come during my absence. I was now fully persuaded that the letter I had written to Mr. Appleton had been intercepted by the false Italian valet, John Wilson; and it was no doubt in consequence of reading the contents of this letter, that the false Marquis saw he was discovered, and that he had so hastily made up his mind to remove me from the scene of his treacherous proceedings. Hence the sudden departure of the sham Italian valet, and his alleged journey to

Brighton; but in reality he must have repaired at once to Ashford and made the requisite arrangements with the Bulldog and Sawbridge for my abduction and captivity. As for the French adventurer, Charles Leroux, he had no doubt trusted that by disguising his person as much as he could—shaving off his moustache and chin-tuft, keeping his hair cut short, wearing a pruque on the crown to conceal his incipient baldness, putting rouge upon his cheeks, and so forth—no one would recognize in the Marquis Visconti of Brighton the Count de Montville of Ashford. On coming to the Grange he must have been terribly frightened the instant his carriage drove up to the door, on beholding me on the steps: but the circumstance of his being thus inside the vehicle at the time, had afforded him an opportunity of composing his features ere he encountered those who appeared immediately after to welcome him. There can be no doubt that he then resolved to trust to his disguise and his own matchless effrontery to carry on the imposture, even against the acuteness of my penetration. The reader already knows how well he had nearly succeeded.

Mrs. Kingston lost no time in remitting to the landlady of the *Saracen's Head* the money I had borrowed of her for my travelling expenses. The constable whom Mr. Kingston sent to arrest the pot-boy at the *King's Head*, returned with the intimation that the man had left his situation a few days back, and was not to be found. On the following morning I received a letter from the landlady of the *Saracen's Head* to the effect that immediately after my departure in the post-chaise the constables visited the den near the churchyard, but that the Bulldog, Sawbridge, and the woman made so desperate a resistance they managed to get clear off. I was much vexed, and indeed frightened at this intelligence: for I feared that I should now become the object of deadly vengeance on the part of those dreadful characters.

Meanwhile Miss Maitland had become very ill. This was scarcely to be wondered at. She had been wounded in the most delicate and sensitive points: the affections of her heart had been blighted—the natural pride of her character had received a signal humiliation—the spirit of her sex was well nigh crushed within her. On the third day after the fearful exposure, Mrs. Kingston told me that Laura wished to see me. I myself had been two whole days in bed by Mr. Sands' advice, and still felt enfeebled and exhausted in consequence of all that I had endured. I was very pale too; and as I looked in the glass, methought that I seemed as if having only just recovered from a long and tedious illness. I accompanied Mrs. Kingston to Laura's room. Oh! what a change—what a sad, sad change had three days worked in that fair but unhappy creature! She was as pale as I was: but her eyes were more sunken—her looks more haggard: she had evidently been suffering deeply. There was an expression of unutterable woe upon her countenance; and when she spoke, it was in the soft subdued sweet voice of ineffable mournfulness. Oh! at that instant what a bitter feeling of indignation, amounting indeed to an ardent longing for revenge, was excited in my soul against the villain who had done this mischief; and as I approached the couch upon which the poor young lady lay, I could not restrain my tears. She extended her hand: it had become

literally emaciated in three days—its plumpness and its healthy warmth were gone—it felt thin to the touch, and had a cold clammy perspiration upon it.

"Mary, my dear friend," said Miss Maitland, "I hear that you have been ill through all you have undergone—and no wonder! But your's has only been the ailment of the body: mine is now the illimitable malady of the soul. You must accept my devoted thanks for the zeal which you testified to rescue me—you understand me—I can say no more—"

She placed her handkerchief to her eyes, and for nearly a minute held it there in deep silence: but at length there was the sound of a gush of tears, followed by a stifling sob; and Mrs. Kingston, throwing her arms around the young lady's neck, besought her not to give way to her anguish. Those tears relieved her; and wiping her eyes, she endeavoured to smile in grateful acknowledgment of her cousin's kindness: but, Oh! what a sickly smile it was, resembling the feeble and transient glimmer of the moon in an ineffectual attempt to break through the clouds of a gloom-cast heaven.

"Mary," resumed Miss Maitland, after a long pause, "I have something to propose to you. I have already talked it over with Mrs. Kingston; and though in one sense she experiences regret at the assent she has given, yet she has not refused this assent. In a word, I wish you to attach yourself to my service. I feel a lively interest in you, and should be glad to have you with me. So soon as my health is sufficiently restored, it is my intention to leave my dear cousin's hospitable mansion and repair to a residence which I possess in the Island of Guernsey. There I mean to bury myself for a time. I must fly from the world. After the dread humiliation I have experienced, I cannot look that world in the face. I feel as if I had committed some awful crime:"—and here again the poor creature's grief burst out afresh.

Mrs. Kingston once more did her best to console her; and then took up the thread of the conversation, saying, "Yes, my dear Mary, it will indeed grieve me to part from you: but Miss Maitland has so earnestly requested that you may accompany her, ostensibly as her lady's-maid, but in reality as a friend and companion, that I am sure you will not refuse her. The welfare of your brother and sister who are with Mr. Sands, shall not be lost sight of by me; and in a word, you may rest assured that you have no truer friends nor more sincere well-wishers in the world than at Kingston Grange. At the same time, you are to suit your own inclinations. If you prefer to remain here, be it so: but it would be a good deed," she added emphatically, "if you will comply with Miss Maitland's wishes."

What could I say? what could I do? I certainly would have preferred remaining at the Grange, so as to be near my brother and sister, and within an easy day's distance of Sarah: but on the other hand, I could not possibly refuse the request made on behalf of an amiable and generous-hearted young lady on whom such a fearful weight of calamity had fallen. It would have appeared unkind to a degree—indeed a positive act of inhumanity—to refuse; and besides, the proposal was in itself so thoroughly complimentary to me. I did not suffer the two ladies to see that I hesitated, but gave my assent to the arrangement. Laura thanked me

with even a grateful fervour; and Mrs. Kingston testified her satisfaction by her looks.

On the following day I went into Deal to see William and Jane, and tell them of this change of condition. Luke, as usual, drove me into the town; and just as I alighted at Mr. Sands' door, whom should I run against but Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins?

"Why, I do believe this is the Kingstons' maid," exclaimed the former old lady. "You are Mary Price, ain't you?"

I bowed respectfully and was about to pass on, when Mrs. Popkins, seizing me by the wrist, held me as tight as if I were in an iron vice.

"Come, you must tell us all about it," she said. "Such strange tales are abroad! Is it true that Miss Maitland has eloped from the Grange and run away after all with her lover?"

"And that you were spirited off and confined in a deep cellar underground, infested with all kinds of reptiles and vermin?"

"Ladies," I answered, "I beg that you will excuse me—I am in too great a hurry——"

"Pooch, nonsense! you *must* stop. But here's the Admiral, I declare!"—and sure enough the old officer came hobbling up to the spot.

"Who have you got here?" he asked, observing that Mrs. Popkins was still holding me tight by the wrist, and that I was struggling as much as I dared to get away. "Why, it's the Kingstons' maid. Ah! well, I am not sorry all this has happened to them. It's a judgment on them for employing such lying knaves of servants——"

"Well, so it is, Admiral," said Mrs. French. "They got rid of us one day with a story of the cholera, which turned out to be all false. Such meanness—they thought we should stop to dinner. But their pride too—that's the most insufferable——and now it has had a fall."

"Why, what do you think this young woman here has just told us?" said Mrs. Popkins: "that it is true Laura Maitland has eloped with the false Marquis——"

"Madam," I said, now disengaging my hand with a violent jerk, "I told you nothing of the kind. On the contrary, it is a vile calumny; and surely poor Miss Maitland has suffered enough already to be spared such detestable fabrications as these."

"You saucy slut, you!" exclaimed Mrs. Popkins, becoming purple in the face: "do you mean to tell me I deal in calumnies?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do!"—and turning abruptly away, I advanced up to Mr. Sands' door. Glancing round after I had knocked, I saw the two old ladies and the Admiral flinging furious looks at me as they passed on; and I have no doubt that they feasted on a rare dish of scandal before they parted.

On entering the house I was enthusiastically welcomed by Jane, who threw her arms about my neck and sobbed for joy to see me. She told me that she was so delighted the other morning to hear of my return, but so sorry to find I had not a moment to see her. I explained that I was in a dreadful hurry at the time; and William soon joining us, I proceeded to inform them of the arrangement which had been made to transfer me from the service of Mrs. Kingston to that of Miss Maitland. They were pleased to think that I was going into a superior

situation, but were naturally grieved at the idea of separating from me. Jane and I went to call upon Mrs. Scudder, whom we found alone and in a very desponding state of spirits. I expressed my hope that nothing unpleasant had occurred, and that her son had acquired a more tranquil frame of mind than when we last saw him.

"I am sorry to say, my dear girl, that he goes on terribly," was the poor widow's answer; "and I am afraid that his reason is somewhat touched. But what dreadful anxiety I have experienced on your behalf! I was so rejoiced when your brother William came and told me a few days back that you had returned. Ah! what a sad thing for poor Miss Maitland—how I pity her! But we all have our troubles in this world; and heaven knows I have mine!"—and then she began to weep.

"I am afraid," said I, "that something has happened apart from your son's continued dwelling upon his wrongs."

"Well, my dear Mary, there is a thing that troubles me very much," answered Mrs. Scudder. "Would you believe it, but by a strange coincidence that horrid man Plummers, the boatswain, has just been appointed to a situation in the Deal coast-guard? Tom came in the day before yesterday dreadfully excited, and told me of it. He declares that if they meet—which of course they must do—he does not think he shall be able to restrain his feelings——In short," added the widow, "he gave way to threats which filled me with terror. And what is worse, Mary, he went out and staid till very late at the public-house, and came home much the worse for liquor. Ah! that dreadful torture he underwent—it has altogether changed him!"

While the widow was giving utterance to these last words, Tom Scudder made his appearance. It was only about two o'clock in the day, and yet I immediately perceived that his countenance was flushed with drinking. He shook me by the hand with great cordiality, congratulating me on my escape from the clutches of the ruffians at Ashford, and vowed with an imprecation that if he had been there he would teach them what it was to play such tricks with any one that he knew. I did not like his manner: there seemed something coarse and reckless about it. It was a month since I had seen him, and he certainly was much changed for the worse.

"What do you think, mother?" he suddenly exclaimed: "that second-rate Plummers has arrived in our town. He came last night; and by accident he went to the *Jolly Tars* to have his draught this morning. My name happening to be mentioned, he asked if it was the same that was on board the flag-ship at Spithead a little time back: and when he was told it was, he began launching out in bitter terms against me. I have just been told all this; and it made me precious wild, I can assure you."

"My dear Tom," said the widow, with tears in her eyes, "I am afraid you have been taking a glass to drown your sorrows. Now, here's our good friend Mary Price, who will tell you how wrong it is in you to give way like this."

"By heaven, there he is at this moment!" ejaculated Tom Scudder, as he happened to glance through the window: then before a hand could be outstretched or a voice raised to stop him, he rushed out of the little parlour and sprang forth from the

house. His mother gave vent to a cry of alarm; and we all three hurried out after him. A stout, middle-aged, weather-beaten man, dressed in the costume of the Preventive Service, and with a spy-glass under his arm, had just halted in front of the cottage. He was in personal appearance quite as ill-looking as Tom Scudder had described him when telling the tale of his wrongs; and therefore from his aspect, as well as from the ejaculation which had burst from the young man's lips, we had no difficulty in recognizing his savage enemy, John Plummers. I do not think the man knew that Scudder lived at this cottage: for he seemed to have halted just outside the window by accident rather than with a fixed intention, and was in the act of raising his telescope to look at some vessel out at sea at the very moment when Tom Scudder rushed out.

"Villain!" exclaimed the latter: "how dare you approach this house into which you have been the cause of my bringing so much misery home to my poor mother?"

"Whom do you call a villain?" demanded Plummers, his ill-looking countenance becoming purple with rage.

"You!" ejaculated Tom Scudder: and at that very instant his clenched fist would have doubtless levelled the man to the ground, had I not caught him by the arm and held him back with all my force.

"For heaven's sake," said I, "beware what you do! You will be sent to prison if you strike this man."

"Ah! prison?" echoed Tom Scudder, struck by the truth of my observation. "It would only require that to drive me mad altogether."

"Yes—but to prison you shall go all the same," retorted Plummers, with a diabolical and malignant expression of the countenance; "for threatening me in the execution of my duty:"—and with these words he strode rapidly away.

"Good heavens, Tom, what have you done?" cried the poor widow, now weeping bitterly and clasping her hands in despair. "Oh! you will yet work yourself into mischief; and then what will become of me? Ah, Tom, you no longer care for your poor old mother."

These words seemed to touch the sailor's heart: all the natural generosity of his feelings resumed its empire in a moment; and saying whatsoever he could to console her, he promised that he would leave his enemy unmolested for the future, and likewise that he would abstain from visiting the *Jolly Tars*. The poor woman, credulous as most loving mothers are, was completely tranquillized; and Jane and I then took our leave, not for a moment thinking that the man Plummers would carry his threat into execution and seek revenge for the little demonstration of feeling into which Tom Scudder had been betrayed. I dined in company with my brother and sister and Mr. Sands' housekeeper; and Luke came in the evening to fetch me back to the Grange. On the following morning when Mr. Sands came up to the house to see Miss Maitland, he brought me a note from William. It was to the effect that poor Tom Scudder had been taken into custody on the preceding evening, at the instigation of John Plummers, and was to appear before the Mayor that day. It instantaneously struck me that as Mr. Kingston was a magistrate, he might be of some service in

helping poor Scudder: so I at once sought Mrs. Kingston, and told her enough to interest her generous heart in the unfortunate sailor.

"Come with me, Mary," she said; "the Squire is at home, and you shall tell him the tale yourself." She accordingly conducted me to the parlour where Mr. Kingston was reading a new work that had just been published relative to the treatment of horses; and at his wife's request he listened to what I had to say. I told him as succinctly as possible all that the reader is already acquainted with in respect to Tom Scudder—the history of his flogging at Portsmouth, and the little incident which I myself had witnessed on the preceding day when I had been fortunate enough to snatch back the sailor's arm ere the blow was struck.

The Squire rang the bell—ordered his bay horse to be saddled—and promising to do the best he could in the case, rode off towards Deal. I experienced some degree of anxiety until his return; for I had seen enough of John Plummers to be well assured that he would leave nothing unattempted which malignity could suggest, to obtain a conviction against the unfortunate young sailor. It was not till late in the afternoon that Mr. Kingston came back. I was then sent for into the parlour, where he told me what had occurred.

"I just got into town in time," he said, "to assist the poor fellow. He was already before the Mayor as I entered the Town-hall. There never was a more villanous-looking scoundrel than that fellow Plummers. I once had an uncommon ugly old iron-grey horse, with the queerest look about its head you ever saw in your life: but it was a beauty compared with this ruffian-like chap Plummers. I expected he would go so far as to say that the blow had been struck: if so, I should have got the Mayor to adjourn the case for you, Mary, to attend as a witness: but he didn't venture upon that falsehood. He however made out the affair as black as he could. The poor old widow, Tom's mother, was crying bitterly in the justice-room. Her son is a fine fellow—as good a specimen of a sailor as my bay is of a horse. His defence was frank and honest: there was no shying, no turning round from the object—but he went right straight at it, like a hunter at a gate. Well, he confessed that he had called the man a villain, and that he should have struck him if he hadn't been held back: he expressed his contrition—said that he had promised his mother not to get into such trouble again, and that he would keep his word. However, the Mayor was for sending him to prison, because it is a serious offence to interrupt the coast-guard in the execution of their duty. But I said enough to the Mayor to induce him to mitigate his judgment to a forty-shilling fine, and hold Tom in his own recognizances to keep the peace. Well, the money was paid—the bond was signed—and there ended the case."

I thanked Mr. Kingston for his kindness in the matter; and I may here add something that I did not discover till afterwards—namely, that on leaving the court, the good-hearted Squire slipped five guineas into the old widow's hand, bidding her do her best to keep her son out of trouble in future, and especially away from the *Jolly Tars*.

Three or four more days passed, and Miss Maitland improved somewhat. I learnt from Mrs. Kingston that their aunt, Mrs. Maitland of



Brighton, having heard of the issue of the love-affair with the false Marquis Visconti, had vowed and protested that no consideration should ever induce her to see her niece again; and as this cruel resolve showed a bad disposition on the part of the old lady, I was not surprised that Laura herself had not made any overtures towards a reconciliation. From inquiries which Mr. Kingston had caused to be made in London, through the medium of some friends there, a new phase in the villany of the French adventurer Charles Leroux was brought to light. It appeared that there really was such a nobleman as the Marquis Visconti—that he had been in the Neapolitan Guards—that he had turned Protestant—had become the object of persecution—and had left his native country in disgust. Therefore, when the Neapolitan Ambassador in London and an eminent Italian firm of merchants in the City, were referred to respecting the Marquis Visconti, they naturally supposed that the real one was

the object of these inquiries. The inference to be drawn was, that the French adventurer must have somewhere become acquainted with the Marquis Visconti: and perhaps ascertaining that the nobleman was going to a distant part of the world, had self-appropriated the title and personified its legitimate owner.

Miss Maitland had become more tranquil in mind by the exercise of that fortitude which a high-spirited young lady as she was, naturally possessed. But she continued in bad health; and it was only too evident that she had altogether received a shock from which her recovery was by no means likely to be speedy. She was however impatient for change of scene: her sense of pride would not permit her to go out, even in her own carriage, and stand the chance of being seen by the malicious gossips of Walmer. She felt humiliated at meeting any of the servants of the household; and when she was able to descend to the drawing-room, she would not on

any account receive the visits even of those ladies and gentlemen who had been invited to the bridal. Under these circumstances it was natural that she should wish to repair to a place where she would be free from this restraint imposed by her own sense of humiliation; and it was accordingly determined that she would depart in two days more.

In the afternoon previous to the day fixed for our journey, I went into Deal to bid farewell to William and Jane. After I had sat with them a little while I told Jane to put on her things and come with me to Mrs. Scudder's; but she begged that I would go without her, and she would tell me the reason when I came back. This she said with an innocent archness that showed me she had a little surprise of some kind to prepare for me; and therefore I willingly humoured her. I proceeded alone to the cottage, and found the good widow and her son sitting at tea. I was welcomed with the wonted degree of warmth; but I was inwardly saddened to observe in the course of the conversation which followed, that Tom Scudder still cherished a bitter sense of the wrongs he had endured at the hands of John Plummers. Whenever he said anything that at all bore reference to the subject, I saw his eyebrows corrugate, and he even set his teeth and clenched his hand involuntarily. The old widow looked distressed at these manifestations, but said nothing. It was now that I first learnt the full extent of Mr. Kingston's generosity a few days back; and I received the grateful thanks of the widow and her son for having been instrumental in procuring Mr. Kingston's attendance at the justice-room on the occasion. Soon after tea, a hoveller, or Deal boat-man, named Philip Johnson, came to speak to Tom Scudder upon some business; and they went out together, the young man promising to return in half-an-hour. When he was gone, his mother told me that he was bargaining with the hoveller for a quarter-share in a boat; and that with the money which remained out of the sum he had received on being paid off, together with the pecuniary assistance of two or three of the Deal pilots who were friendly disposed towards him, Tom would be enabled to accomplish his object. She added that she should be glad when it was settled, as she hoped that when he obtained regular employment for his time, the morbid state of his feelings would wear off.

The half-hour passed—but he did not return: and as it was now dusk, I thought of taking my leave. The widow begged me to remain a little longer: so I waited another half-hour, at the expiration of which time Tom Scudder made his appearance. He looked agitated; and we both immediately saw that something had happened: but he evidently had not been drinking immoderately. Flinging his hat into a corner of the room, and throwing himself upon a chair, he slapped his hand violently upon his leg, exclaiming, "By heaven! mother, if it had not been that your image rose up before me, I would have knocked that fellow down just now, even if I had gone to gaol for six months."

We both anxiously inquired what had happened, at the same time beseeching him to be cool.

"Yes, as calm as I can," he answered bitterly. "But now you shall judge for yourselves whether I haven't had sufficient provocation to make a saint resent it. You saw me go out quiet enough with

Phil Johnson just now. We had to talk on business: and so we went to his house, which is close by. We settled our bargain for the boat, and I gave him five pounds on account. Here's the receipt!"—handing it to his mother. "Well, when it was done, Phil Johnson proposed that we should go and whet it at the *Tars*. Of course I couldn't refuse: but I said we would have only just one glass, as I wanted to get back home as soon as possible. We went to the *Tars*; and I wouldn't go into the parlour, because I knew I should be kept if I did; so we stood at the bar drinking a drop of grog. Three or four other hovellers were also lounging about there, taking their glass and chatting. Presently who should walk in but Jack Plummers? It was just at the moment that I was paying for what me and Phil Johnson had been having: I had thrown down a sovereign, and was waiting for the change. 'Hullo! how we are flashing our money about,' vociferated Jack Plummers: 'it's only to be hoped it's honestly come by, that's all.'—I knew that this was meant for me; but I said nothing, for Plummers was more than half-seas over.—'Talk of money,' he said, in a bragging tone, 'I'll be bound to show as many sovereigns as o'er a man here can show shillings. I had my pay t'other day; and a warrant-officer's pay is more than a poor beggarly fellow like the mast can boast of.'—This again was meant for me: but still I said nothing. Plummers called for grog, and having drank a deep draught, grew more boastful still. I could not exactly slink away, or else it would have been said I was afraid of him: so I stopped, surveying him with as much cool composure as I could. Presently he pulled out a handful of money—sovereigns, bank notes, silver, and coppers, all jumbled together. 'You had better take care of your blunt, old chap,' said Phil Johnson: and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder significantly towards two very ill-looking men who had just entered the place to obtain some drink.—'What do I care?' roared out Jack Plummers. 'But you are the friend of a fellow I wouldn't be seen speaking to. So don't you speak to me.'—'Ah, I wouldn't have earned the name of Cat-o'-nine-tail Jack,' said Phil Johnson with a taunting laugh.—'It's a precious deal worse,' returned Plummers, 'to have had the cat-o'-nine-tails though.'—At this provocation, which was hurled at me, I started and took one pace forward with the intention of knocking the ruffian down. But your image, mother, seemed to rise up before me; and I stopped short. Then I turned abruptly away and rushed out of the house."

"You did well, my dear son—you did well," exclaimed his mother, throwing her arms about his neck. "Come, do not think anything more of the matter; but endeavour to rise above the mean provocations of this bad man Plummers."

"Permit me, Mr. Scudder," I said, "to echo your mother's good advice. It will be more noble of you to treat this man's cowardly conduct with a lofty scorn, than to suffer him to provoke you into retaliation. He is evidently bent upon injuring you; and it will be the bitterest vexation for him if by your contemptuous treatment he fails in his purpose."

"You are right, Miss Price—by heaven, you are right!" exclaimed Tom Scudder, evidently struck by the truth of my observations: then extending his hand towards me with all the honest

frankness which naturally characterized him, he said, "You have told me something that I did not think of before. Yes, I will treat the fellow with scorn and contempt. This is my positive resolution; and I shall not be deterred from it. I already feel the strength of a settled purpose."

Both Mrs. Scudder and myself expressed our sincerest delight at these assurances—the more so as we saw that they were given with an earnest determination to adhere to them. I now rose to take my leave. The sailor offered to accompany me as far as Mr. Sands' house: but I declined, always making it a rule to avoid placing myself in a position that might afford scope to the tongue of scandal. With many kind wishes given and returned, I bade farewell to the widow and her son, and issued forth from the cottage.

The evening was very dark—so dark indeed that I could scarcely see two yards before me. The atmosphere was one unvaried pitchy blackness: it seemed as if a funeral pall overspread the face of heaven. Even the lights from the windows of the houses appeared to shine in dimly, as if through a mist. My path lay along the verge of the beach for a short distance; and then there was an interval with no houses at all, so that in this place I had not even the lights from the windows to guide me. I walked slowly, for fear of coming in concussion with some object: for there were several large boats and luggers drawn high up on the beach—there were also windlasses and cables—and it would have been dangerous in the extreme to have come in sudden contact with any of them, or trip over a rope. All in a moment I saw a great black object right in front of me, and within two yards of which I suddenly stopped short. It was a very large boat; and I was about to turn aside to pass clear of it, when I was rivetted to the spot with consternation on hearing a well known voice speaking close by. Yes: it was a voice too well known—that of the Bulldog: and I soon distinguished that it came from the other side of the boat. An indescribable horror seized upon me: for the frightful thought flashed to my mind that these monsters (Sawbridge being with him, as I now heard his voice also) had come to Deal for no other purpose than to wreak their vengeance upon me.

"Well then," said the Bulldog, evidently in continuation of a discourse previously commenced; "since it is really all up with the Frenchman and the marriage-business, I suppose it's no use our staying in Deal any longer?"

"No use at all," answered Sawbridge. "But what a precious plight we are in—not a mag in our pockets!"

"And all the money that we had, too, in our place at Ashford at the time when the constables broke in! By goles," added the Bulldog, in the deep tones of his dreadful voice, "it's enough to drive a feller mad. What say you, Nick, to a precious bold stroke?"

"What's that, Ben?" asked Sawbridge.

"Why, setting bang off home to Ashford and getting into the house in the middle of the night—to-morrow night, I mean—and seeing whether our money was all took away or not."

"It was sure to be," answered Sawbridge. "Them constables were certain to ransack the place from top to bottom. It would be running into the lion's mouth to go back there. You see, that puss

Mary Price is this time bent upon doing us a mischief."

"I have an uncommon great mind," said the Bulldog, "to do *her* a mischief. Only we can't afford to throw away time on mere vengeance just at this moment. Money is what we want—and money we must have."

"Well then," rejoined Sawbridge, "hasn't nothing struck you, Ben?"

"To be sure it did," responded the Bulldog. "But I say, let's go and sit farther down the beach and talk. People may be passing by here: it's close by the pathway."

To my infinite relief I heard the two miscreants moving away from the spot where they had been thus conversing: but I remained immovable until the tread of their feet on the loose stones of the beach was drowned in the murmuring of the waves. Then I quitted the spot to which terror had kept me transfixed, and hurried onward without thinking of the necessity of avoiding the various objects that endangered the path in the darkness of the night. But fortunately I reached the nearest houses without accident; and then, guided by the lights from the windows, was enabled to pursue my way in safety.

I had passed through ten minutes of unspeakable horror. The circumstance of finding myself so suddenly, so unexpectedly, in the close vicinage of those dreadful men, had made my blood congeal in my veins and a cold perspiration burst out all over me. Infinite therefore was the relief that I now experienced on finding myself in safety. Reflecting upon all I had overheard, I perceived that the Bulldog and Sawbridge had not, as I first thought, come to Deal with any hostile intent against myself—but to ascertain the result of the French adventurer's enterprise, doubtless in the hope that I might have returned too late to prevent its consummation, in which case there would have been perhaps a handsome reward for them. It was satisfactory to know that they did not contemplate anything vindictive against myself—at least for the present: and I need hardly tell the reader that I was rejoiced to find they had lost their ill-gotten money at their den at Ashford—that money no doubt being a portion of the recompense they were to receive for succouring the designs of Charles Leroux. That they had descended farther down the beach to discuss some new villany, was tolerably evident: but of what nature it was impossible to conjecture.

While wending my way back to Mr. Sands' house, it occurred to me that I ought to hasten and give information to the constables, and have the men taken into custody: for I certainly felt desirous of punishing them for the captivity they had made me endure. But scarcely had this idea entered my head, when I heard the clock of the chapel-of-ease striking seven; and it only wanted half-an-hour to the time when Luke was to call for me. This half-hour I naturally wished to pass with my brother and sister, and therefore went straight on to the surgeon's house. I found that the reason why Jane had desired to remain at home, was to finish a bead-purse which she had been making for me, and which had required an hour or two's work to complete at the time I had asked her to go out with me. She now presented it to me, with smiles on her lips but

tears in her eyes—the former indicative of her innocent satisfaction at being enabled to make me this gift, and the latter testifying the sorrow she experienced at the prospect of separation. I thanked the dear girl for that mark of her affection; and when Luke came with the chaise-cart, I bade her and my brother an affectionate farewell.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STEAM-PACKET.

ON the following morning, as early as nine o'clock, Miss Maitland's carriage was in readiness. When the moment for departure arrived, Mrs. Kingston took me aside, and placing in my hands a small box, about two inches square, said, "You will accept this, Mary, as a token of my esteem. It is but a trifle; because if I were to offer anything of large value to a person like yourself, it would seem as if I thought your good conduct could be rewarded at a particular price. But it is priceless; and therefore the little memento I now beg you to accept, is but a proof of my appreciation of your excellence, and not an attempt to reward you for anything you have done. You are going with an excellent young lady, who will be kind to you; and I am sure that you will be a consolation to her. I need scarcely repeat what I said the other day—that at Kingstone Grange you are always sure of finding friends."

My good mistress then kissed me affectionately; and the three young ladies took leave of me with equal kindness. I shed tears as I embraced little Kate, for whom I had conceived a great affection; then as I turned away from the room where this scene had taken place, I found my hand suddenly grasped by the Squire, who in his honest open-hearted way wished me all possible prosperity. I took leave of my fellow-servants, all of whom expressed their sorrow at my departure. Mrs. Taylor made me a present of a very pretty work-box; and as I passed through the hall, I received a kind shake of the hand from Mr. Hutton. I followed Miss Maitland into the carriage; and the equipage drove away. As it passed down the gravel road I saw Luke exercising the old roan; and I could scarcely help smiling at an incident so characteristic of the place and the man, that he should shout out his honest farewell from the back of the animal whose splendid qualities he had so often eulogized in my hearing.

I need not dwell upon the particulars of our journey. Suffice it to say that Miss Maitland was very dull and unhappy during the whole day, and spoke but little. We travelled straight on, with post-horses, through Kent and Sussex, into Hampshire; and at a late hour in the evening reached Southampton. There we put up at the best hotel in the town, and soon retired to rest, both of us thoroughly wearied with the long journey of above a hundred miles. I must here observe that it was not until I thus retired to my chamber, an opportunity presented itself for opening the little box which Mrs. Kingston had given me; and I found that it contained a beautiful gold watch, with my name engraved inside the case. My heart swelled with gratitude towards the good kind lady who had presented me with so handsome a memento of her

friendship; and though in my humble condition I could not wear it—nor indeed was I tempted by any feeling of mere vanity to wish that I could,—I nevertheless regarded it with pride and satisfaction, inasmuch as it was a proof that my conduct had been considered worthy of such a handsome acknowledgment. With such thoughts did I seek my pillow; and at an early hour in the morning I rose, as the steam-packet which was to bear me with Miss Maitland to Guernsey left at nine o'clock. We embarked,—the carriage and all the boxes having been put on board; and the splendid steamer glided majestically along Southampton Water.

The day was very fine for the season of the year (the month of February), but bitterly cold; and we accordingly descended into the ladies' cabin. But this was very much confined, and was crowded with female passengers, who having got first on board, monopolized all the seats, so that it was with difficulty Miss Maitland could obtain one, while I was compelled to stand.

On emerging from Southampton Water, the vessel by its motions indicated that there was rather a rough swell at sea; and the consequence was that some of the ladies became sick. The stewardess intimated that as there were several ladies with their husbands and fathers in the gentlemen's cabin, it would be quite becoming for those ladies who thought fit to repair thither; and this being the case, Miss Maitland decided that we should shift our quarters. We accordingly proceeded into the saloon of the vessel; and I was astonished to find how spacious it was and how handsomely fitted up. There were a great number of passengers, male and female, collected there; but it was by no means inconveniently crowded, and we at once obtained seats. The motion of the steam-packet increased somewhat; but neither Miss Maitland nor myself felt particularly inconvenienced. The young lady, with her veil drawn over her countenance, fell into a deep reverie; and I read a book which I had brought with me. Presently I heard a gentleman make some remark in a cracked affected voice, which instantaneously struck me as being familiar; and looking up, I recognized Mr. Bergamot. He was conversing with another gentleman, whom I likewise knew, and who was none other than the Hon. Captain Lavender.

These two Exquisites were dressed with the nicest precision and in the most fashionable manner, as they were wont to be when I first introduced them to my readers; and they were so highly perfumed that the fragrance of the scents and oils used in their toilet, diffused an almost over-powering odour throughout the cabin. I could not help recollecting that when a long time back I had first seen these Exquisites in Hyde Park, when I was riding with Lady Harlesdon in her carriage, Mr. Bergamot had represented that Captain Lavender was well high ruined and that there must be "a smash" soon; but certainly he looked on the present occasion as little as possible like a ruined man. Both he and Mr. Bergamot appeared to be in excellent spirits: for they were conversing with as much hilarity as was consistent with their consummate affectation; and they frequently laughed at what they said, however trifling it was.

"By the bye, Lavender," said Mr. Bergamot,

"you don't seem to have that same fellow with you that you used to have?"

"Ah, no—I got rid of Jenkinson," responded the Captain. "He was a very good, useful kind of a fellow in his way, and took great care of one's clothes. But it was impossible to keep him after the horrifying discovery I one day made——"

"Indeed!" said Bergamot. "And what was it?"

"Ah, the wretch!" replied Lavender. "He actually wore cotton stockings in the morning——"

"You don't say so?" cried Bergamot, in mingled horror and dismay.

"Yes: but that wasn't all," said Lavender. "The wretch *malted*!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bergamot, immensely shocked. "You positively and actually mean to say he drank the vulgar stuff called *beer*?"

"I do indeed," responded Lavender, with a doleful shake of the head. "What will become of the man, it is impossible to say with such a dreadful propensity."

"He must go to the dogs," said Bergamot. "By the bye, you saw that vulgar-looking fellow who was dining in the coffee-room the same time as ourselves last night—I mean at the hotel at Southampton?"

"To be sure. He looked like a tradesman. I noticed," continued Lavender, with a look of ineffable disgust, "that the wretch drank Port wine and helped himself a second time to soup."

"What an atrocity!" said Bergamot. "I am sure if I had noticed it I should have fainted."

"Ah!" rejoined Lavender, "I did not choose to shock your feelings by directing your attention to it: but I can assure you that it quite spoilt *my* dinner. Did you not notice that I turned very pale and looked exceedingly ill at one time?"

"Yes, I did—pon my soul! I recollect now," exclaimed Bergamot, in his cracked voice; "but I thought you found the champagne sour, or the hock not exactly the thing, or the claret not up to the mark——"

"No—the wines were good enough," answered Captain Lavender. "But I will tell you what it was. Happening to look round, I saw that wretch of a vulgarian eating his fish with his knife."

"And such a man to come to a first-rate hotel!" said Bergamot, holding up his hands, with their fawn-coloured gloves, in utter dismay. "But I was going to tell you what happened with me and that odious wretch. You recollect you went out for an hour in the evening——"

"Yes: and you were not brave enough to face the cold wind."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Bergamot. "I am so exceedingly delicate. The service——alluding to his duties as an officer in a cavalry regiment,—"is killing me—pon my word, it is! Well, when you went out, I remained in the coffee-room, taking delicate sips of the claret and enjoying its aroma, when that vulgar wretch, who, I remember now, was actually drinking some hot mixture at the time—I think they call it brandy-and-water—There is such a mixture, is there not?"

"I think I once heard of it," replied Lavender, speaking however dubiously, as if he did not like to commit himself to a positive assertion on such a grave point. "But pray go on. What did the time do?"

"The monster actually succeeded in forcing his conversation upon me," continued Bergamot. "I don't know how it was, but I suppose I felt out of sorts, being all alone—and so I condescended to answer him. He said something about the weather—next made a remark upon politics—and then observed that, 'thank God everything was peaceful and quiet in the world.'—'The world?' said I, determined to hit him hard: 'and pray what do you know of the world?'—He coloured, looked impudent, but knocking under again, asked me what I understood by the term *world*.—'The world,' said I, 'is the place I live in. It is a circle drawn round Grosvenor Square which any thorough-bred could complete in about ten minutes.'—You should have seen how the fellow stared! 'Pon my word, it was very amusing—very!'—and here Mr. Bergamot gave a prolonged laugh in his cracked affected tones.

"Capital!" exclaimed Lavender, also laughing until he seemed dreadfully fatigued with the exertion. "But what else took place?"

"Why, the wretch called for another glass of that steaming mixture—I forget its name again—and then looking at me very hard in the face, he said, 'Perhaps, sir, you would have the kindness to enumerate what you consider the world to be composed of.'—'Very well,' said I: 'since you appear to desire it, I will. The world, my good fellow,' I continued, 'is composed of one sun, one moon, myself, my coat, my horse, and an indefinite number of men, women, and brutes.'—'And pray, sir,' said he, 'amongst all those objects which do you consider to be the most important?'—'Amongst the men,' said I, 'my tailor.'—'And pray,' he asked, 'what do you consider to be the population of the world?'—'About a thousand,' I immediately replied, 'because there are no more who are admitted to Almack's.'"

"And what did he say to this?" inquired Lavender, with a languid yawn.

"Why, he had the impudence to ask me if there was no other world with which I was acquainted; and he named a place called the City. You may suppose how astonished I looked: but I soon set him to rights, by telling him that although I had read Captain Cook's Voyages to the South Seas, and Captain Parry's to the North Pole, as well as Mungo Park's expeditions into the interior of Africa, I did not remember any of those explorers having discovered a place called the City."

"And what did he say then?"

"He poured the liquor down his throat like a madman—rang the bell violently—and ordered another glass. When it was brought, he seemed resolved to have at me again: so he asked if I knew such a building as St. Paul's Cathedral? I could not help confessing that I had once caught a glimpse of it; and he appeared hugely delighted.—'Then,' said he, 'perhaps you may happen to recollect, sir, if the effort of memory is not too great, such a place as the Strand?'—I confessed that I was at fault and begged him to give me a hint as to whether it was a peninsula, an isthmus, or an island. The monster actually became savage, and I really fancied he was going to make an assault upon me. So I placed a fruit-knife quite handy to resist him; and I suppose that the movement overawed him: for he instantly became quiet again, and then asked whether by any accident I had ever obtained a

glimpse of Oxford Street. I candidly admitted that I had once crossed it on my way to the Regent's Park: but to the next question he put, I could not undertake to assert whether it was inhabited or not. He evidently saw that I knew more than he did of the world; and therefore he gave up questioning me."

"It was high time," observed Captain Lavender: "but I really think that the landlord of that hotel ought to have been warned against admitting such people."

"To tell you the truth," rejoined Bergamot, lowering his voice and assuming a mysterious look, "I had the curiosity to ask the waiter, when the fellow had left the room, who he was."

"And who was he?" asked Lavender. "It would be curious to know the name of an individual who drinks Port wine, helps himself twice to soup, and eats fish with a knife: because one won't run in the way of a savage if one can help it, for fear of being tomahawked. But who was he?"

"Sir Peter Pumpkin, an Alderman of London, as I was told. But what is an Alderman?"

"Well, I think I have heard," replied Captain Lavender, very deliberately and very dubiously, "that he is a member of some committee or club whose sole occupation is devouring turtle-soup and venison, and who lay wagers with each other to see who can eat the most."

In this manner did the Hon. Captain Lavender and Mr. Bergamot continue to discourse for upwards of an hour. One was seated with his legs astride a camp-stool; and the other was leaning negligently against a brass pillar that supported the deck of the vessel. Every now and then, in the midst of their discourse, they put up their eye glasses and fixed their looks with an impudent stare upon any female who specially attracted their notice. They looked very hard at me several times, but did not appear to recollect me: or if they did, they chose not to recognise me. They talked loud enough to be heard by everybody in the saloon, but with as much ease and unconcern as if they were alone by themselves. They did not even appear to be talking for the purpose of being remarked or showing themselves off: much less did they seem to feel that they were rendering themselves perfectly ridiculous and inspiring disgust with all around. Indeed, one would have thought that this was their usual style of conversation, and had become so habitual that they themselves experienced no sense of there being any nauseating peculiarity in it. At about two o'clock they remarked to each other that "having eaten very little breakfast in consequence of having to rise so confoundedly early, they would see whether there was anything fit to eat on board." The steward was accordingly summoned; and then, Mr. Bergamot undertaking to give the orders, the following dialogue took place:—

"Oh! you are the steward, eh?"—and Mr. Bergamot, sticking his quizzing-glass in his eye, took a good long stare at the man.

"Yes, sir—the steward, sir. What are your orders, sir?"

"Ah—hem—I and my friend—hem—feel as if we could eat a mouthful. What have you got—eh?"

"Cold beef, sir——"

"Beef! What's that? I say, Lavender, the man says he's got beef. What is it? Is it something to eat or drink?"

"Cold beef, sir—cold pigeon-pie—cold fowls—ham—tongue:"—and thus the steward ran on enumerating the contents of his larder.

"The man speaks Greek or Hebrew," drawled out Bergamot.

"Chops and steaks, if you please, gentlemen," added the steward.

Bergamot looked dismayed and turned a glance of mournful appeal upon Lavender, saying in a distressed voice, "Pray, my dear fellow, do help me to understand this man."

"Oh, I can't!" exclaimed the Captain. "He's talking of things I never heard of in my life."

"Broiled ham and poached eggs—or devilled kidneys, gentlemen."

"At last he speaks English," said Bergamot: then arranging a curl over his left temple in a languid manner, he added, "Give us some of those things you mentioned last."

"Yes, sir—devilled kidneys. What will you take to drink? Bottled ale and stout—London porter——"

"Heaven help me!" murmured Mr. Bergamot: and he fanned himself with his perfumed cambric kerchief of about eight inches square, as if he were on the point of fainting; while Captain Lavender looked utterly agast.

"Have you any champagne?" inquired Bergamot, appearing to recover slowly from nature's exhaustion.

"Champagne, sir? No: it's never called for on board these boats. Port and sherry, and beautiful French pale brandy."

"I think," said Bergamot, heaving a profound sigh, "that we must put up with the pale brandy. I have heard of it—and we may as well avail ourselves of this opportunity to taste it. What say you, Lavender?"

"It's the only alternative," replied the Captain, in a voice of deep affliction.

"But I say, steward," resumed Bergamot, "I do feel uncommon peckish—and so I think you may as well put all the things you've been talking of upon the table, besides the what-d'ye-call-'ems."

"The kidneys. Yes, sir:"—and away bustled the steward.

I felt rather surprised that the man should have so quietly and patiently endured the insufferable airs of these two Exquisites: but then I reflected that he dared not quarrel with his customers, let them be of never so coxcombical a description. In a few minutes all the comestibles the steward had named were spread by himself and his waiter upon the table. The kidneys were brought in very shortly; and a pint-decanter of pale brandy likewise made its appearance. Everything was served up with neatness and propriety: but when the two Exquisites took their seats and slowly drew off their kid gloves, they gave a simultaneous ejaculation of dismay and exchanged horrified looks. There was now quite a sensation in the cabin; for every one really thought that something serious had happened—and one old lady, feeling convinced that the boiler was about to burst, fainted outright. The steward rushed to the table, but could see nothing the matter. The cause of the two gentlemen's ghastly

horror was however quickly made known, when Mr. Bergamot looked at the steward in blank despair, faintly murmuring, "Steel forks!"

The steward hastened to produce plated ones, confounding himself in apologies for not having silver: but several minutes elapsed ere the two gentlemen could bring their minds to touch the substitutes. At length the keenness of their appetite no doubt prevailed over their absurd fastidiousness; and with an exchange of many deploring remarks in their own nauseating style, they commenced their luncheon. I must say that for two such delicately nurtured gentlemen they did uncommon justice to the various articles spread before them: the kidneys soon disappeared, and although but a few minutes back they had professed such utter ignorance of cold fowl, ham, and pigeon-pie, they not only understood perfectly well how to carve and cut those vulgar things, but likewise how to enjoy them. For the pale brandy, too, they exhibited an equal relish. In short, having made what might be called a very hearty luncheon, Bergamot inquired for the "thing-embob;" and when the steward showed by his looks that he did not quite understand, the young fashionable explained it by saying, "The bill." The steward summed up the different items verbally, announcing that the whole came to seven shillings and sixpence: whereupon Mr. Bergamot threw down a sovereign.

"Change, sir," said the steward, quickly counting out the difference.

"Oh! I never take silver," observed Bergamot, with a look of half-aversion and half-careless indifference at the shillings and sixpences. "Give it to your man."

The steward bowed almost to the very floor of the cabin; and dropping all the change save a solitary sixpence into his breeches-pocket, he said to his waiter, "Here, Tom, the gentlemen are kind enough to give you this." Tom looked amazingly discontented, but saying nothing, pocketted the sixpence as if it were an affront.

The two Exquisites then decided upon going on deck to smoke cigars; and when they had languidly dragged themselves up the staircase and disappeared from the view, the ladies and gentlemen in the cabin exchanged glances amongst themselves, as much as to imply that it was quite a relief to be freed from such insufferable coxcombs.

It was dark when the steam-packet entered the harbour of St. Peter's Port, the only town which Guernsey possesses. Miss Maitland had written to the house-keeper, Mrs. Thornton, who had charge of the residence in Guernsey, to inform her of her intended visit; and we accordingly found this person, together with a man-servant, waiting for us. The man-servant was left to see the luggage and also the carriage landed; while Miss Maitland, myself, and the housekeeper lost no time in entering a fly, which whirled us away to our destination.

CHAPTER XC VII.

MY NINTH PLACE.

THE island of Guernsey is situated about a hundred and twenty miles from the southern coast of England, but within a very few miles of the French

shore. It is a dependence of the British crown, but enjoys its own institutions and laws. Its circumference is under forty miles. The town of Peter's Port stretches for about a mile along the shore, and rises amphitheatrically up the acclivitous coast, so that when viewed from the sea scarcely a house is lost to the eye, and the buildings appear one above the other in bold succession.

Miss Maitland's house was situated about two miles from the town, and stood in the midst of a garden, not large but well laid out, and containing several shady walks formed by evergreens. The grounds were enclosed by a high wall: but as the dwelling-house stood upon an eminence in the midst, the windows commanded a beautiful view above the barrier of masonry. As Miss Maitland and her aunt had been accustomed to visit this residence in Guernsey generally once every year, there was a small establishment of servants maintained at the place. These consisted of Mrs. Thornton, the housekeeper—a prim, taciturn, and even sour-looking woman—not very tall, but excessively thin—or to use a more vulgar but expressive term, seraggy. She dressed in black silk, and was very particular with her white caps, which somewhat resembled those worn by widows. The footman was named Matthew: he was an elderly man—short and stout—with a bald head, a very red face, and a nose that indicated an addiction to the bottle. I did not much like his look or his manner the very first moment I saw him. There was a gardener—a very old man indeed, who appeared to be in his dotage, and was so deaf that it was necessary to strain one's lungs most painfully to render the voice loud enough to make him hear; and I wondered how, enfeebled as he was, he could possibly attend to the grounds and keep them in the good order in which they appeared to be. But I soon discovered that he was assisted in this task by his two grandsons, so that his place was a sort of sinecure. There was a housemaid, delighting in the euphonious name of Janetta: she was about five-and-twenty—excessively ugly—but as vain and conceited as if she were the greatest of beauties. She dressed outrageously smart, wearing long ringlets, and fine caps with pink streamers. Then there was the cook, an old woman of about sixty—very fat and very lazy, with a countenance as large and as red as that of the footman, and with a similar nasal indication of a love of strong waters. The old gardener lived in the house—or rather occupied a room over the stables: but his grandsons resided elsewhere. They were young men, the elder being about twenty-four, and the other two years his junior. In personal appearance they were neither uncouth nor brutish; and there was a certain sharpness, amounting almost to a sinister cunning, in their looks. Their christian names were Henry and Edward: their surname I have forgotten.

There were no horses in the stables, as Mrs. Maitland, the aunt, had been accustomed to bring her own equipage with her when she visited the island. Laura had her own separate carriage, but had been wont to use her aunt's horses when at Brighton; and she had travelled with post-horses on leaving that town to visit Kingston Grange, as well as during our recent journey thence to Southampton.

With respect to the servants whom I found at Miss Maitland's Guernsey residence, I had not been there four-and-twenty hours ere I had experienced

ample cause for wonder that a young lady of such good taste and of such refined feelings should possess such an extraordinary household. But that Miss Maitland herself was by no means contented with it, and considered some little explanation to be necessary, I was soon made aware; for on the second evening after our arrival, when I was attending her in her own chamber on retiring for the night, she took an opportunity of speaking to me upon the subject.

"Mary, I am afraid that you will not be very comfortable with those servants: but as there is so little need for you to have communication with them, you will perhaps excuse some few annoyances. The fact is, that with the exception of the housemaid, they have all been many years in their present service. My late parents engaged them; and on that account I am unwilling to part with them, unless absolutely necessary. The housemaid was engaged by Mrs. Thornton, and has not been here long. As yet I know very little of her, but do not much like her appearance. I am afraid that the footman and the cook are rather addicted to drinking: but I have spoken very seriously to Mrs. Thornton to-day, and she will give them suitable hints upon the subject. The truth is, Mary, they have all been left a great deal too much to themselves, and therefore it is not altogether to be wondered that having little to do, they should fall into habits which cannot be countenanced. However, if you find anything to complain of, do not for a moment hesitate to speak."

I said nothing: for my poor young mistress was so thoroughly unhappy in her mind that I resolved to put up with anything rather than distress her. But although I had been so short a time in the house, I had nevertheless seen enough to convince me that I was looked upon by the servants as their mistress's special favourite, and therefore with an evil eye by themselves. Miss Maitland had assigned to me a fine large bed-chamber, superior even to that occupied by Mrs. Thornton; and as it was furnished with a carpet, a table, and several chairs, it was to serve me as a sort of sitting-room for myself. Indeed, it was intended that I should take my meals there: but I had at once decided, on entering the house, to join the other servants at the usual repasts—for I was resolved not to provoke their ill will by assuming a superiority over them. The mere fact, however, that it was Miss Maitland's original intention for me to occupy an exclusive position in the household, rendered all the servants my enemies; and not even the concession I thus made to their feelings, could dissipate the ill effects of that arrangement, although I had abandoned it. The housemaid, especially, showed her spite towards me within a few hours after my arrival,—tossing her head when she looked at me—throwing out innuendoes about "favourites being spies"—and conducting herself towards me with a marked hostility. Mrs. Thornton was coldly civil, and nothing more. Matthew the footman eyed me in an impudent manner, and addressed me with a coarse familiarity—evidently with the intention of convincing me that he only regarded me in the light of an ordinary servant although I bore the denomination of lady's-maid. As for the cook, she eyed me suspiciously: and even Old Dick the gardener, prompted by the rest, looked cross and surly. These were my ex-

periences of my fellow-servants for the first two or three days after my arrival; and had it not been for Miss Maitland's sake, I should have at once taken measures to render my stay there as brief as possible.

Immediately it was known in the island that Miss Maitland had arrived at her residence, there was a continual succession of knocks at the door from visitors who called to pay their respects in the usual manner. But none were admitted. The reply was that Miss Maitland found herself too unwell to see any body; and this announcement was by no means untrue. Her bodily health, as well as her spirits, had received a cruel shock from the treachery of Charles Leroux; and the fatigues of the long journey from Deal to Southampton, followed by those of the voyage across to Guernsey, were more than she should have encountered in her enfeebled state. Thus, when she declined to receive visitors on the plea of ill-health, the excuse was a truly legitimate one. The servants could not however understand it. Miss Maitland had always been fond of society, and had of course moved in the very best circle in the island of Guernsey: so that as she was not ill enough to be actually compelled to keep her bed, the domestics could not comprehend why she should have resolved upon leading this life of utter seclusion. For the intelligence of what had occurred at Walmer had not reached Guernsey; and thus my fellow-servants were entirely in the dark as to the cause of their young mistress's failing health and lowness of spirits.

One evening, about a week after our arrival, I was sitting at tea with the servants, in a room which adjoined the kitchen and where the repasts were accustomed to be taken—(it was called "the house-keeper's room," although it served all the purposes of the servants' hall in a larger mansion)—the conversation turned upon the subject to which I have been alluding.

"I wonder what has come over young missus," said Matthew the footman, who having been out all day to make arrangements for a pair of job-horses for the carriage, had evidently partaken of more than his ordinary quantity of *refreshment*. "It isn't nat'ral that she should coop herself up like this—she as used to be so lively and gay."

"Why don't you ask Mary?" exclaimed the housemaid Janetta, with a toss of her head. "I dare say she could tell you, as she came from England with young missus, and therefore must know what has been taking place there."

All eyes were turned upon me: but I said nothing, and endeavoured to look as if I did not know a response was awaited from my lips.

"There are some people," said Mrs. Thornton, who always spoke briefly, and could speak bitterly, "who like making a mystery of things."

"But for my part," exclaimed Janetta, "I don't understand that sort of thing amongst one's fellow-servants. Let them as lives in the parlour have their own friendships to themselves: but let them as lives in the kitchen be all on a confidential footing. It's like giving one's-self airs, to know a secret and keep it close."

"I dare say if you ask Mary right out what you want to know," said the cook, "she wouldn't refuse to tell you."

"Not she—she couldn't," cried Matthew. "Why



should she? She's only a servant like ourselves—and perhaps not so good as some of us has been: for my father was a master-miller——”

“And mine was a linen-draper,” said the housemaid, “and he gave me a hedication.”

“Well, why don't you put the question slap to Mary, then?” exclaimed Matthew.

“I will,” said Janetta; then looking me very hard in the face, but in an impudent manner, she observed, “I know there's some secret about young missus, and therefore I ask you what it is.”

“If Miss Maitland had entrusted me with any secrets,” I replied, “I certainly should not betray her confidence; and if there were any matters relating to her which I considered ought not to be made the subject of discussion, I should be equally silent.”

“Dear me, how precise we are in our way of talking!” exclaimed the housemaid, with a still more

indignant toss of the head than ever—and at the same time she darted a furious look at me.

“This is an evasion—a mere evasion,” observed Matthew; “and we can't put up with it. I know what's right as well as any man living; and I say that our missus's affairs is our affairs, and we have a right to know 'em—and them as makes a secret of 'em, isn't proper society for us.”

“It certainly does not look well that Miss Maitland should come here all alone, without her aunt, and shut herself up like this,” said Mrs. Thornton.

“It's more than enow to make us have rum suspicions,” said the cook, who indeed smelt very much of the liquor whose name she used as an epithet.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” I said, unable to retain my indignation at the woman, “to talk in that manner.”

“And pray who are you,” cried the cook, starting up from her chair and putting her arms akimbo,

"that you speak to me in that 'ere style? I would have you know I'm as good as any day—and p'raps I'm your betters."

"Mind what you are saying, cook," cried the housemaid: "for favourites is always spies."

"If you think," said I to Janetta, "that I am capable of playing the part of tale-bearer, you are very much mistaken:"—and I rose to leave the room although I had not finished my tea.

"Now, I tell you what, Miss Sauce-box," exclaimed the housemaid, starting up in a rage from her chair, "if you have any of your nonsense to me I'll spoil that face for you which I dare say you flatter yourself is so mighty pretty."

"No, no—don't scratch her face for her—pray don't," said Matthew, meaning that he really wished her to do it: "for she'd only go straight up to the parlour and post herself in front of young missus, so as to be asked what is the matter."

I remained to hear no more, but quitted the room: but I was actually compelled to make a circuit of the table in order to avoid the chance of coming into downright collision with the enraged and spiteful Janetta. I ascended to my own chamber; and although I endeavoured to rise superior to the sense of these little tyrannies on the part of my fellow-servants, yet I could not possibly restrain my tears. This was the first place I was ever in where I had not found myself on good terms with the other domestics. It was quite evident they had resolved to make a dead set at me; and I was surprised that a woman in Mrs. Thornton's position should lend herself to such a proceeding and encourage such conduct. I feared that I should be indeed very uncomfortable in my present place; but I resolved to endure it as long as I possibly could.

Miss Maitland was accustomed to have me to sit with her for three or four hours every day. She conversed very little, and continued in so desponding a state that it did me harm to see her. I read to her—but frequently observed that she fell into a profound reverie, which would last for half-an-hour at a time; so that when she aroused herself again, she had totally lost the thread of the subject. Sometimes, when the weather was fine, she would make me walk with her in the garden: but there she wandered in the same listless abstracted mood, and I began to fear that so far from being enabled to rally her spirits or recover her health in the seclusion and mild atmosphere of Guernsey, she would grow worse in both respects.

As Miss Maitland felt too unsettled to purchase horses immediately, a pair of job-horses were procured when she wished to take an airing in the carriage; and on those occasions I invariably accompanied her. I had thus an opportunity of beholding the principal features of interest which the Island of Guernsey presented to the view. It was only when taking these airings in the carriage that Miss Maitland appeared somewhat to rally her spirits. The fresh breeze appeared to do her good, and brought back a slight tinge of the banished roses to her cheeks. It was then too that she occasionally showed a disposition to converse; and she gave me some insight into the society of the island. There are no titles of nobility nor any artificial degrees of rank conferred by the local institutions; but nowhere, not even at the West-End of London, do

more aristocratic feelings prevail than amongst the higher grade of the inhabitants of Guernsey. The aristocracy may be said there to consist of the gentry; and there is not the slightest mingling between the gentry and the commercial classes. There are a number of wealthy merchants and retired tradesmen in Guernsey: but these are all regarded by the gentry in the same light as the aristocracy in England regard the middle class. The exclusive grade in Guernsey is denominated the Sixties, while the middle class is called the Forties. The origin of these distinctions is involved in as much doubt as that of the political nomenclatures of Whig and Tory. There is however an anecdote told, which is generally believed to explain the true cause of those singular titles. It appears that the wealthy families of merchants and retired tradesmen, indignant at being studiously and insolently excluded from the higher grade, resolved to cement as much as possible the bonds of their own friendships and sympathies; and they therefore subscribed a sum of money to build a large ball-room on one side of the Market Place, where they might meet once a week for purposes of innocent recreation. The ball-room was erected, and the architectural plan included forty pillars for supporting the structure. The higher grade, consisting of the exclusives, were determined not to be outdone; and they also subscribed amongst themselves a sum of money for the erection of a ball-room for their own particular use. This was raised on the opposite side of the Market Place, and was built upon sixty pillars. Thus, from this rivalry in respect to the ball-rooms, is supposed to have originated the names of the Sixties and Forties.

These denominations are as generally adopted and as universally applied in Guernsey as those of Whigs and Tories in the sphere of politics, or those again of Aristocracy and Middle Class in the range of English society. If a gentleman belonging to the Sixties happens to espouse a lady belonging to the Forties, he does not raise his wife up to his own rank, but at once descends to her's; because none of the Sixties will thenceforth visit at his house or invite him to their's, and thus he is compelled to mingle with the Forties if he would not be compelled to renounce all society whatsoever. These marriages are however very rare, the Sixties regarding it as a sort of degradation to contract them, and only doing so when impelled by cogent pecuniary reasons. Nevertheless, there are families amongst the Forties as well educated, as genteel in manners, and as polished in all the amenities of life, as the very best families amongst the Sixties. Therefore the barrier which divides them is maintained only by the insufferable pride and arrogant exclusiveness of the Sixties.

As a matter of course, all Miss Maitland's acquaintances existed amongst the higher grade; and when out riding in the carriage, she was compelled occasionally to stop and converse with those who were most intimate: but she neither went into society nor received guests at her own house.

I had been about six weeks in Guernsey when my position was rendered so intolerable by the conduct of my fellow-servants that I began seriously to reflect upon the necessity of speaking to my mistress on the subject. All kinds of indignities were heaped upon me: tyrannies of the meanest, paltriest, and

pettiest character were practised; and I should blush to allude to them, were it not for the purpose of showing all I had to put up with. Mrs. Thornton presided at meal-times; and as she had the entire management of the household expenditure, she took very good care that the servants' table should be well supplied not only with necessaries but also with luxuries. When there were two or three different dishes, she would pointedly ask each of the other servants which they preferred; but she always addressed herself to me last of all, and omitted to give me any choice in the matter. Thus, if there were cold meat and hot dishes, she would without any reference to my taste serve me with the former. Of course I cared nothing for the circumstance itself, it being indifferent to me what I eat so long as the food was wholesome: but the manner in which I found myself treated was galling enough. At first I was summoned to my meals: but after a time I was left to find out as best I could when they were ready; and as there was no regularity in this respect, I sometimes found everything cleared away when I descended to the housekeeper's room, and was then insultingly told that if I did not come for my meals at the proper time I might go without them. When I accompanied my mistress in the carriage and returned after the usual hour of dinner—or what ought to have been the usual hour—I found nothing put away for myself; and if I were ever so hungry, I preferred going without food rather than ask Mrs. Thornton or the cook for anything from the larder. But it was not so much these annoyances that made me think seriously upon my position in the household: it was the constant insults, abuse and even threatenings of personal chastisement, to which I was subjected—especially by Janetta and the cook. Even Old Dick, the gardener, did his best to exhibit his ill-temper towards me, and made grunting noises as I passed him. But what was I to do? Poor Miss Maitland was too much absorbed in her own grief to suspect what was going on; and indeed, even if she were not, how could she have suspected that I was patiently enduring such treatment? I did not like to speak to her on the subject. She was so ill—so desponding—so changed, poor girl! from what she was a few weeks back, that I had not the heart to distress her with my complaints. After serious deliberation I resolved to seize the first opportunity of testifying my spirit, and convincing my fellow-servants that I would no longer submit to their persecutions. Such an occasion was not long in presenting itself, as the reader shall now be informed.

I had returned from a ride with Miss Maitland one afternoon about three o'clock, and as we had been driving along the coast on Lancresse Common—a wide open space on the northern part of the island—the fresh sea-breeze had given me a more than ordinary appetite. Indeed, I was literally hungry and felt faint: but on descending to the housekeeper's room, I found, as usual, that all signs of dinner had disappeared and nothing was set apart for me. Mrs. Thornton was seated near the window, reading a novel—which indeed was her usual occupation; and as I entered the room, she gave a short cough as a sign of contempt, and went on with her book. I said nothing, but passed into the kitchen; and entering the pantry, I found the

larder looked as usual. But all the servants might have access to it except myself.

"Cook," I said, "I want my dinner."

"I know nothing about it," returned the woman, who was lolling in a chair near the fire: and taking a glass of rum-and-water—her favourite beverage—from the mantel, she drained its contents.

"Have you the key of the larder?" said I.

"No, I hav'n't—and that's all about it."

Without another word I returned to the housekeeper's room.

"Mrs. Thornton," I said, "I will thank you for the key of the larder."

"You are not the housekeeper, I believe?" she replied with a sneer.

"No: but you are—and that is wherefore I address myself to you. I have had no dinner and I require some."

"Then you should come to your meals at the proper time."

"You know very well that I was in attendance upon my mistress—"

"Attendance indeed!—a pretty attendance when a young lady makes a companion of a scrub of a servant!"

"I ask you for the key," said I firmly.

Mrs. Thornton looked up at me very hard and with a nasty reptile malignity in her small dark eyes: but perceiving that I had a certain air of resolution, she rose from her seat and passed into the kitchen. I followed her. We entered the pantry—and she unlocked the larder, in which there were several dishes of cold viands. For a minute she inspected them all; and then selecting the well-hacked bone of a leg of mutton a week old, she pointed to it, saying, "There—take that and have it for your dinner."

"It is only fit to be thrown to the dog," I said, "and I will not take it."

"You dainty slut, you!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton.

"Very well," I said: "this passes all bounds. You cannot think I shall put up with it:—and I moved out of the pantry."

"Well, stop a minute then, and I will see what else you can have," she exclaimed, in a voice that convinced me she was furious with rage. I however made no answer, nor yet stopped—but ascended the stairs. She was now evidently frightened, and doubtless thought that she had gone too far. Perhaps she had taken my long endurance of petty tyranny and persecution as a proof of want of spirit, and had thus been encouraged by my resignation to push her own cruelty to this extreme verge: but now that she found herself mistaken, she grew alarmed for the consequences of her tyrannical behaviour. She accordingly rushed after me, and catching me by the arm, said in a half-smothered voice, "What are you going to do?"

"You will see," I replied: and breaking away from her, I ascended to my own chamber. There I rang the bell. I waited five minutes—and no one answered the summons. I accordingly rang again. This time I was more successful in obtaining attention—such attention as it was!—for Janetta came flouncing into the room with her ringlets and her cap-ribands all streaming behind her head; and with furious looks, she cried, "Hoity-toity! what does all this mean?"

"You will have the kindness to bring me up a tray with some dinner," I said, calmly but firmly.

"Go down and fetch it. Surely you can wait upon yourself?"

"I have already been down stairs, and was treated in a manner that will not permit me to expose myself to the same rudeness over again."

"But do you think, then, that I'm to wait upon you?"

"Henceforth," I said, still mildly but resolutely, "it is my intention to take my meals up here—for which I have Miss Maitland's express permission and authority. Indeed Miss Maitland has all along believed that I have taken my meals here by myself."

"Then you intend to be waited upon like a lady?" said Janetia, pale and quivering with rage.

"I have no such arrogant presumption. I endeavoured to fall into the habits of my fellow-servants: but if they choose to treat me in the way they have done, I have no alternative except to act as I am now doing. In one word, therefore, be so kind as to comply with my request."

"Oh! it's a request, is it?" she said, as a sort of compromise for her own offended dignity: "and not an order?"

I made no answer: for I was wearied of the excitement produced by this irritating bandying of words—and the reader may easily imagine that although my demeanour was calm, my spirit was firing up within me. Janetia lingered for a few moments to see if I would say anything; but finding that I held my peace, she flounced out of the room, leaving the door wide open, and ejaculating, "Well, I never! Things is brought to a pretty pass! What will the world come to next?"

"What's the matter, Janetia?" asked Matthew the footman, who was at that moment ascending the stairs.

"Why, Mary Price won't take her meals down stairs no longer," continued the enraged housemaid; "and she wants to be waited on like a lady."

"Well," cried Matthew, "sooner than I'd stand the humbugging nonsense of that gal, I'd be hanged!"

I closed the door of my apartment that I might hear no more; then half-an-hour elapsed without the appearance of Janetia, so that I began to suspect she was determined to dare all consequences rather than comply with my request. I was however mistaken; and just as I was about to ring the bell again—for I had determined not to be beaten—she re-entered the room, bearing a tray without a napkin, but with a plate of cold beef, cut very thick and from the rawest part. There was a piece of bread, and a little salt was placed on the side of the plate. She dropped rather than placed the tray upon the table, and was flouncing out of the room again, when I called her to stop.

"Well, what is it now?" she said impertinently.

"I cannot eat that," I replied; "and moreover I have a right to better treatment. You would not like to be served in this manner yourself. I insist upon having a comfortable meal properly brought up."

"You may say and do what you like, Miss Impudence," cried Janetia, shaking her curls and looking daggers at me. "Mrs. Thornton says that the whole house isn't going to be put out of the

way for you. You've given yourself airs enough already in ringing for me to wait on you. Matthew swears he will stand no more of your nonsense; and cook vows that if you don't come home in time to your meals, she'll give all the wittles away to Old Dick's grandsons every day after dinner just to spite you."

"Janetta," I said, determined to carry my point—for I saw that if I yielded now, the house would be rendered perfectly intolerable to me,—"if you do not instantly take down this tray and bring it up with a clean napkin and some food that I can eat, I will go straight and inform Miss Maitland. I have endured too much misery and wretchedness during the six weeks I have been here——"

"Well then, I won't take it down—and so that's all about it!"—and turning round with such a whirl that her dress spread out like an opera-dancer's, she was on the point of leaving the room, when to her dismay she found herself face to face with Miss Maitland, who at the instant made her appearance upon the threshold of the door which the housemaid had in her impudence left wide open.

"What is the meaning of all this?" inquired my young mistress, the flush of indignation returning to those cheeks which sorrow had left so pale.

"Oh! nothing ma'am—nothing pertikler," replied Janetia, half confused and half prepared to brazen it out. "It's only Mary who won't eat the nice wholesome things that I've took all the trouble to bring up to her."

"Stop, Janetia!" said Miss Maitland as the housemaid was endeavouring to escape from the room. "I have overheard more of the conversation that has been going on than you are aware of. Mary, my dear girl, it was with unspeakable pain and grief I heard you say you had endured so much while under my roof."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Janetia: "she's been as happy as a little princess."

"Silence!" said my mistress, looking angrily upon the housemaid. "I know Mary Price too well to believe that she would complain without a reason; and I can appreciate the generous feeling which has induced her to remain silent for so long. Do I want proofs of the treatment she is receiving? Look there!"—and she pointed indignantly to the tray with the plate containing the thick slices of half-raw meat. "Now go down stairs and tell Mrs. Thornton to meet me in the parlour in about five minutes."

"Well, ma'am," cried Janetia, with the most impudent effrontery, "I hope you ain't going to believe all that this minx will tell you——"

"Begone, I say!" exclaimed Miss Maitland, stamping her foot upon the floor—and all the fire of her spirit, hitherto crushed by sorrow, flamed up again.

Janetta was suddenly overawed and began stammering some excuses: but my mistress pushed her from the room and closed the door behind her.

"Now, my dear Mary," she said, taking me by the hand, "tell me all that those wretches have made you endure. Do not attempt to screen them. I know your generous heart—but if you allow it to influence you in this case, you will be doing me an act of injustice by inducing me to keep a worthless set of servants. Things have gone too far: therefore you must speak without reserve. Indeed, I

happened to overhear enough to convince me that there are too many beneath this roof in league to annoy you."

Perceiving the force of Miss Maitland's observations, and that it would be unjust towards herself not to make her aware of her servants' conduct, I related to her sufficient of the insults and indignities I had received to corroborate her belief that I had not complained without just reason. I nevertheless drew the picture as mildly as I could, concluding with a hope that a reproof from herself would teach the domestics to be more civil to me in future.

"No, Mary," she exclaimed, with indignation expressed in every lineament of her countenance; "the matter cannot be passed over thus lightly. I took you away from a comfortable situation with the promise that you should be happy here; and I am sorry to find that I have not looked sufficiently after your welfare. Indeed, I have treated you badly, Mary—I have neglected you—I have left you to the mercy of others——"

"Do not speak thus, Miss Maitland," I exclaimed. "I am truly distressed that anything which has occurred should have reached your ears."

"Indeed it was full time," she said. "But I must leave you for a few minutes. One word however. Has the gardener ever shown you any incivility?"

"I have not so much to complain of in respect to him——"

"But still he *has* treated you uncivilly. Yes, Mary—do not attempt to plead on his behalf."

With these words Miss Maitland hurried from the room; and I felt annoyed with myself that I had gone so far—for I saw that my young mistress was very painfully excited. Ten minutes elapsed; and at the expiration of this interval the door opened and Mrs. Thornton herself appeared, bearing a tray covered with viands all neatly spread upon a clean napkin. Her looks were grave—but her face was very pale. She removed the first tray from the table; and having placed thereon the one she had brought, asked, "Is there anything more you want?"—and though her voice was cold and low, yet I could perceive in its accents the evidences of a deeply concentrated rage.

"No, I thank you," was my response, civilly given.

She lingered for a few moments, as if in the expectation or the hope that I would say something: but I held my peace—and she accordingly quitted the room. I could not eat—my appetite was entirely gone—I experienced the faintness which unappeased hunger leaves behind it when its own keenness has passed. The painful scene which had occurred, troubled me much. It was the first time I had ever quarrelled with my fellow-servants in any place I was ever in; and though there was not the slightest ground for self-reproach, yet did I experience a feeling like that of remorse for having given rise to the disturbance. In a few minutes my young mistress joined me again; and perceiving that I had eaten nothing of the various things brought up, she prayed me to sit down and partake of them while she talked to me. I did so in order to satisfy her, and forced myself to eat a few mouthfuls.

"Mary," she said, "you will not be surprised at

what I am going to tell you. I have given the whole of the domestics due warning to leave my service. This notice I have communicated to Mrs. Thornton on her own account, as well as for all the rest; and I have emphatically assured her that if during the short time they remain here, they either by word or deed exhibit an ill-feeling towards you, the offender or offenders shall be dealt with according to the severe laws of this island, which have provided for the punishment of disobedient and refractory servants. Until I obtain others, Mrs. Thornton will herself attend upon you; and I beg that you will not overlook the slightest mark of disrespect should any be offered. Do not attempt to intercede in their behalf," added Miss Maitland firmly; "for my mind is made up."

I could say nothing, beyond expressing my thanks for Miss Maitland's kindness towards me; and she almost immediately left the room, looking very ill—for now that the excitement of the scene had passed away, the reaction was attended with a proportionate despondency of spirits and a sense of physical exhaustion. I also felt very unwell: for the whole affair had distressed me much. I longed to descend into the garden and enjoy the fresh air: but I was fearful of encountering any of the servants, who I knew must be more than ever embittered against me. I accordingly endeavoured to divert my mind from disagreeable reflections by working and reading: but I could settle myself to neither. At the proper hour Mrs. Thornton brought up my tea; and though she said nothing, yet the glance I threw upon her as she entered, gave me the idea of an enchained fury. Indeed, it was evident that with the strongest effort only could she subdue a terrific outburst of rage. I gladly partook of my tea, for I experienced a most distracting headache; and finding about an hour afterwards that it did not get better, I resolved upon descending into the garden and walking there for a little while. It was now dusk. The season was the commencement of Spring, for we had reached the end of March; and in that genial climate the nipping chills of winter had already passed. There was a freshness in the air which did me good; and the breeze gratefully fanned my feverish temples.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE EVERGREEN AVENUE.

I HAD walked for nearly an hour, and was returning towards the house, when I heard footsteps in the same avenue of trees which I was at the moment threading. It was pitch dark beneath the umbrageous canopy of evergreens; and stopping short, I stood irresolute how to act—whether to advance and meet whomsoever might be approaching, or turn and retrace my way: for I had no doubt that the steps I heard were those of the gardener or his grandsons, or else of some of the servants, as they were the steps of more than one individual—methought two. That instant of irresolution on my part was most providentially fortunate, as will hereafter appear: for it was while I thus stopped short, and consequently when no sound of my own footsteps gave warning to the persons advancing that there was any one there to overhear them, I caught a name which in a moment enthralled all my senses.

"John Wilson," said a man's voice—and I recognized that of Matthew the footman.

"Oh! that's the name, is it?" immediately asked another voice; and this I knew to be that of the gardener's younger grandson, Edward.

"Yes, that's the name, Ned," replied Matthew; "and you see the recompense is a deuced handsome one."

"But it's dangerous though," observed Edward. "If the thing didn't all turn out as Wilson's master hopes, what a precious mess we should be in."

"Yes—but from all Wilson says, there's no doubt it will," answered Matthew.

"Come, tell us a little more about it, and then I'll speak to my brother and see what he says. If he's agreeable," continued Edward, "I'm sure I shall be; for as the old man"—meaning his grandfather—"is to have the sack, in course we sha'n't have no more employment here; and it's a deuced good thing we are losing, what with capital pay and such lots of broken wittles. Hang that Mary Price for having made all this mischief!"

"Ah! so I say," observed Matthew, with a terrible imprecation against myself. "But there ought to be a seat somewhere hereabouts. Let's sit down a bit, and I'll tell you more of this matter; so you can talk it over with your brother Harry and then let me know what you have decided on."

The two men had advanced very slowly while thus conversing, and had frequently stopped short; so that they did not come as far as the spot where I had remained standing in the dense obscurity. They groped their way to the seat which was close by; and I availed myself of the opportunity to glide noiselessly as a spirit amongst the trees immediately behind them. I had heard enough to convince me that some terrible plot was in contemplation against my unfortunate mistress: for who could Wilson's employer be, save and except his vile master, the branded galley-slave Charles Leroux? With intense curiosity, therefore, did I await further revelations from the lips of the treacherous Matthew.

"You see, Ned," he went on to say, "as it's all up with me in respect to young missus, and I am under notice to quit, and safe to be sacked without a character, or else a deuced bad one, which is wuss than none at all—I can't do better than fall into this John Wilson's plans."

"But how did you first meet with him?" inquired the gardener's grandson.

"Why, I seed the fellow loitering in the neighbourhood for the last two or three days, and couldn't think what he wanted. He looked precious hard at me every time I met him, and seemed to want to speak, but still hung off as if he wasn't sure whether it would be safe or not. So this afternoon, when Mrs. Thornton told us all we was under a month's notice to leave, I went out in sheer vexation to go to the public-house, and on the way I meets this here fellow that I had seed lurking about. So I goes up to him, and asks what it is he wants. I suppose he twigged that I was right after all, and was to be trusted; and he asks if I would like to put a hundred guineas or so into my pocket? I told him I rayther should; so he opens his mind, and then I learns for the first time what it was that made young missus come here all by herself, shut herself up just like a nun, and look so down-hearted and pale. You see she's desperate in love with Wilson's master,

and though the marriage was put a stop to at Deal, a matter of two months back, by something which this Mary Price found out, Wilson's master is nevertheless so sure, if he could only carry young missus off and keep her a close prisoner in a place he's took for the purpose t'other end of the island, that he would be able by threats or else by persuasion to make her marry him, that he is resolved to venture it. Now you know the whole business, Ned."

"Then Wilson and his master have got the thing pretty well all cut and dried?" observed Edward thoughtfully.

"To be sure. Don't you see they have by what I have told you? The Frenchman——"

"Who's the Frenchman?"

"Why, Wilson's master, to be sure; and he's been in the island for the last fortnight a planning the whole thing and seeing how it can be done. He's got plenty of money, there's no doubt about that——"

"How do you know?" demanded Edward.

"Because Wilson showed me a couple of hundred pounds as a proof that the cash would be forthcoming. Ah! it made my mouth water," added Matthew, "I can tell you."

"The business looks nice enough," responded the gardener's grandson; "and for my part I don't mind joining in it. But you know my brother Harry is rather a difficult fellow to make anything of; and he will be wanting to know all the rights of it from Wilson's own lips."

"Well then, I tell you what I'll do," said Matthew: "I'll have Wilson here to-morrow night at this very hour and in this here very place. You can talk it over in the mean time with your brother Harry; and then you can both be here to-morrow evening to meet Wilson."

"Why not at the public-house?" asked Edward.

"No, that won't do," replied Matthew: "we couldn't be by ourselves there, and we might stand a chance of getting heard or suspected, or what not. There's nothing like doing things quiet. You, me, and Harry, together with Wilson of course, can manage the business quite comfortable——"

"Then you don't mean to let anybody else into the secret?" asked Edward.

"Not such a fool, Ned. The more there is of us, the less will be the share of each; because Wilson says his master will give three hundred pounds if the job is done neat. And so us three—I mean you, Harry, and me—can get it all for ourselves."

"And you say that Wilson's master has already hired a place to take young missus to?"

"Yes: a capital place—quite a lonely house that's been to let for the last two years. You know where it be:"—and then Matthew gave his companion a description of the solitary dwelling thus alluded to.

"Ah! it can't be better—I know it well enough now," observed Edward. "Young missus may scream herself hoarse there before she will get any body to come to her assistance. It's only the waves and the sea-birds that will answer her. But this Frenchman must be precious sure of success to spend his money and run such a risk."

"Oh! he's quite sure. He knows young missus is desperate in love with him; and he means to try all kinds of pathetic scenes and what not to win her over. If that won't do, then he will have recourse

to threats; and what with one thing or another he isn't afraid of failure."

"Well, at all events that's his look-out," observed Edward. "I know very well that when I get my share of the tin, I shall be off to England; and so, however the thing may end, it won't matter much to me."

"And that's just what I shall do," responded Matthew, "because there will be no hope of getting another sittings here in Guernsey without a character; and even suppose *missus does* marry the foreigner, and *does not* peach about the chaps as carried her off, she wouldn't give me a character none the more for that. But I think we had better part now; and I'll go in-doors again."

"And I will let myself out of the garden-gate," replied Edward.

The two villains then separated. I remained where I was for several minutes after their footsteps were lost in the distance; and then I hastened towards the house. But it suddenly struck me that if I entered by the back way I must pass through the kitchen, and should perhaps be observed by Matthew, who would instantaneously perceive that I had been in the garden and suspect that I had overheard him. I accordingly resolved to enter by the front door. My mistress was seated in a parlour on the ground-floor; and advancing up to the casement, I tapped at it gently. She immediately came to the window; and as I approached my countenance close up to the glass, the light within streamed upon it. I made her a sign to open the casement, which she immediately did, in mingled astonishment and alarm at what naturally appeared so strange a proceeding on my part.

"Hush!" I said. "Speak low."

"What is the matter, Mary?" she inquired, in a quick tremulous voice.

"Please to let me in as gently as you can by the front door."

Miss Maitland closed the window; and in a few moments I was admitted into the house. The instant we were alone together in the parlour, I prepared her to hear what I had to relate; but her nervous excitement, attenuated as she had become alike in mind and body, was for some minutes so great that I dared not enter upon the astounding revelations I had to make. But at length I succeeded in gradually breaking to her the entire plot in all its dark and treacherous ramifications. For a long time she sat silent, absorbed in deed reflection: and at last slowly raising her eyes, she fixed them with a peculiar look upon me,—saying, "What, Mary, would you advise?"

I must confess that I was somewhat astonished at the mournful tranquillity of manner which she now displayed. I had anticipated the flaming-up of her natural spirit into the excitement of a strong indignation; and I felt shocked at the thought that this fine spirit of her's had been so bent as perhaps never again to recover its pristine elasticity. She had asked me what I would advise: but I knew not how to respond to the question.

"You do not answer me," she said; "and you even look surprised. I can understand what is passing in your mind. You wonder that I have not testified a fiery indignation at the intelligence of this treacherous plot. But, Mary, I have loved that man too well to be enabled to make up my mind all in a

moment to do him harm. It is true that he deserves no mercy at my hands: but I would much rather leave him to such punishment as his own conscience must sooner or later cause him to experience, than be the instrument of invoking the law's vengeance upon his head. Besides, Mary," she added, after a pause, "you know how studiously I have endeavoured to avoid the exposure of my piteous case to the world; and if I seek the intervention of the authorities, I must tell everything. All the infamous treatment to which I have been subjected would be proclaimed by the newspapers wherever the English language is read or spoken; and it would only require that crowning humiliation to crush me altogether."

Miss Maitland ceased; and her tears fell fast and thickly. I took her hand and said everything I could to console and strengthen her mind: but for some minutes my endeavours were ineffectual.

"Yes, my dear mistress," I observed when she had wiped away her tears and appeared soothed by my ministrations; "I fully appreciate the reasons which prompt you to avoid having the case dragged before the public."

"Then can you not suggest some means by which the plot may be frustrated without exposure? Oh! but a few months back—yes, even a few weeks—my own imagination would instantaneously have furnished a dozen projects, if necessary, for such a purpose: but, alas! my mind has lost its former powers, and thought itself is an exertion save when brooding over my wrongs. What is to be done, Mary? Fortunately there is ample leisure for the discussion of any plan which we may adopt, and for carrying out any arrangements we may settle upon. You say it is to-morrow evening that the man Wilson is to be brought by Matthew to meet the gardener's grandsons in the evergreen walk?"

"Yes—to-morrow evening," I answered; "and you may depend upon it, Miss Maitland, that I shall be there to overhear everything that passes. But inasmuch as to-morrow evening's meeting of the villains may be speedily followed by a daring attempt to carry you off, perhaps in the course of to-morrow night, we must not leave it to the last moment to make our arrangements."

"Then again I ask what do you suggest, Mary?" said Miss Maitland. "Shall we leave Guernsey to-morrow?"

"I would not counsel such a step, ma'am; for whithersoever you go, may you be followed by him who appears to be bent upon persecuting you; and whatever project we adopt, should be of a nature that while avoiding publicity, it should at least convince that individual that he has nothing to hope from you."

"Nothing indeed!" exclaimed Laura, with a stronger emphasis than she had before used, and also with a flush of indignation upon her cheeks. "I have loved him too fondly to find it in my heart to prosecute him before the tribunals, but at the same time there is no feeling of weakness in my soul that could possibly induce me to yield to his persuasion. No, Mary, I would sooner die the most miserable of deaths—I would sooner pine away in that lone prison which he has prepared for me on the sea-shore—than accompany him to the altar, even though he had not another wife alive. Ah! Mary, now that all my wrongs come so vividly

back to my mind," she exclaimed, her eyes flashing fire and the colour deepening upon her cheeks; "I feel that it is almost a crime to spare him!"

She paced the room in considerable agitation; and I took the precaution of peeping out at the door to see if there were any listeners in the hall; but there were none.

"Ah! if it were not for the mortification of exposure," exclaimed Laura after a pause, "I think that I should invoke the aid of justice. But no, no: that humiliation would kill me outright! Mary, what is to be done?"

"There is but one course which I can think of," was my answer: and I proceeded to develop my plan. "It is very evident that the intention of the traitors is to carry you off in the middle of the night. Your chamber will be entered, and you will be made prisoner. That at least is their design. Let me be with you: we will receive the invaders together—and by convincing them that everything is discovered and that their employer's hope in respect to yourself is utterly vain and groundless, the villains will be glad to beat as precipitate a retreat as possible. But should they, in spite of this conduct on our part, proceed to violence and persevere in the attempt to carry you off, we must be prepared for such an extremity. Therefore I would suggest that the officers of justice should be lying in wait outside the walls of the garden, so as to be in readiness to act in case of emergency. They need not be made acquainted with the real motives for which their services are required: they may be led to suppose that a burglarious entry into the house is expected——"

"This will scarcely do, Mary," interrupted Miss Maitland; "for if the officers be lying in wait, they will seize upon whomsoever they may observe entering the garden stealthily."

"I had foreseen this objection, Miss Maitland," was my rejoinder, "and think that it can be set at rest. The officers may be instructed to watch the front part of the house only, as your own people will take care of the back premises; and thus, even if they should observe the gardener's grandsons entering by the gate of the back garden, they will not interfere with them, but will naturally suppose that they are keeping watch in your interest. The plan that I thus suggest has every chance of accomplishing the desired object without exposure; and at the same time it neglects not all necessary precautions."

"Be it as you say, Mary. To-morrow I will pen you a note to the magistrate, to whom you will give such explanations as you may deem requisite for procuring the services of some of his officers. Will you undertake the whole management of your project?"

"I will, Miss Maitland," was my answer. "And now let me beseech you to tranquillize yourself as much as possible, and by no means afford Matthew any reason to suspect that his treachery is fathomed."

"You may trust me, Mary, in this," responded my young mistress. "The affair is most important; and for all the reasons which we have canvassed, it requires delicacy and tact in its management."

I slept but little that night, for my thoughts were actively engaged in surveying all the details of my plan, so that it could not fail of success; and when

Lumber did at length visit my eyes, I was haunted by troubled dreams, in which the images of Charles Leroix, Wilson, and Matthew were conspicuous. I awoke at an early hour, and immediately after breakfast sought my young mistress, who gave me a note to the magistrate. Provided therewith, I walked into St. Peter's Port—obtained an interview with the functionary to whom the note was addressed—and informed him that from circumstances which had reached the knowledge of my mistress, a burglarious entry into her house was expected during the next night or the following. He questioned me relative to the manner by which this information had been obtained; and I told him it was from a discourse overheard during the darkness of the previous evening, and in the neighbourhood of my mistress's abode. I further observed that there would be no necessity for his officers to act in any way until an alarm should be given, as if the attempt were made it would be desirable to let the burglars proceed so far that if they were arrested their accomplices might be captured simultaneously with themselves. The magistrate said that he now understood the drift of the affair, and that some of the servants belonging to the house were no doubt suspected? Under this impression, he approved of the course to be adopted, and promised that for the coming night, and for the three or four following ones, if necessary, there should be half-a-dozen of his officers lying concealed at just such a distance beyond the wall of the front garden that any summons from a window of the house would be at once responded to. I thanked him on my mistress's behalf, and took my departure.

I thence proceeded to a gunsmith's shop; and entering, said that I wished to purchase a pair of pistols, to be used by a man-servant in a house that was situated in a somewhat lonely neighbourhood. The gunsmith looked at me very hard—as well he might: for it was no doubt a strange application to be made by a young female. I at once produced a card, which I had procured from my mistress, and which bore her name and address; and the gunsmith recognized that name, which was well known in the island. Still he hesitated, and recommended that the man-servant should come himself and choose what he wanted. Quite prepared for such an observation, I replied that I was commissioned by my mistress to make this purchase, and that if he did not choose to serve me I could go elsewhere; but that if he supposed there was anything wrong in the transaction, he could send up the pistols in a case, addressed to Miss Maitland, in the course of the day. He was now satisfied, and displayed a case containing two weapons, together with powder and ball, and all the requisite accessories. I said that I had no doubt they would answer the purpose, and that I would pay for them at once; but that as I had heard of pistols bursting, I had been expressly directed to have those which I was to purchase, fired off before concluding the bargain. The man smiled, and said that he would speedily gratify me in this respect: he accordingly proceeded to load them before my eyes, explaining that he put in treble charges in order to prove their strength. I closely watched the proceeding, and thus learnt how to load the weapons—which indeed was my object in requesting him to fire them. Having charged them in the manner described, he



conducted me into a long shooting gallery at the back of the premises, and there fired off the pistols, —afterwards observing with a smile that he would warrant they might be used in safety so far as their strength was concerned. He packed up the case in paper for me: I paid him the amount of his demand, and retraced my way homeward.

I explained to Miss Maitland all that I had done; and she looked rather astonished when I spoke of the pistols: but I assured her that if she desired by her firmness to strike terror into the minds of the men employed against her, she must not hesitate to adopt a bold and heroic course. To this argument she assented; and the pistol-case was locked up in her own bed-chamber. The day passed without any farther incident worthy of mention; and as the dusk approached, I confess that I felt somewhat nervous at the idea of having to play the spy upon the desperate characters who were to meet in the

garden. I looked from my window, and saw that the evening was setting in dark, and therefore favourable to my purpose. But still how slight an accident might betray my presence in the garden to those men!—and if such discovery took place, might they not in the first moment of excitement immolate me to their rage? While I was thus pondering, Miss Maitland came to my room; and shutting the door carefully, she said, “Mary, I have resolved to accompany you into the garden presently. I cannot consent to permit you to run any risk on my account which I am afraid to share.”

I thanked my young mistress for her kind consideration, but at once saw more than one reason to induce me to dissuade her from her purpose of accompanying me. In the first place, her absence from the house at such an hour would be perceived, whereas mine would not, as Mrs. Thornton could

have no reason to visit my chamber at that part of the evening. In the second place, there was an infinitely greater chance of two persons being detected playing the part of spies, than of one; and in the third place, when my task should be accomplished, it was absolutely necessary that Miss Maitland should be on the alert to let me in at the front door, as she had done on the preceding night. She admitted these reasons to be cogent, and after some hesitation yielded to my arguments and renounced her intention of accompanying me.

It was now quite dark, and the hour was at hand for me to descend into the garden. For a moment I had a great mind to arm myself with one of the pistols; but as they were locked up in Miss Maitland's chamber, I was fearful of alarming her by the request that she would give them to me, inasmuch as she might thence suppose that the risk I was about to run was greater than I had chosen to represent it. I therefore descended unarmed into the garden, escaping from the house without being observed by any of the domestics. It was very dark; and I occasionally found myself treading upon the borders as I endeavoured to pick my way towards the evergreen avenue. At every dozen paces, too, I stopped to listen for any footsteps that might indicate the presence of others: but all was still. I reached the avenue—groped my way to the particular seat where Matthew and Edward had rested on the preceding evening—and concealed myself amongst the trees immediately behind that garden bench. Not long was I posted there, when I heard the footsteps of men advancing slowly, and every now and then stopping as if the individuals paused thus to listen. Then I heard Matthew's voice say, "They are not here yet: but they know where to join us."

"And you are sure they will come?" said another voice, which I had no difficulty in recognizing to be that of John Wilson.

"Certain sure," replied Matthew. "I saw Edward—that's the youngest brother—this afternoon, and he told me that he had spoken to Harry, who was quite willing to enter into the business. There ought to be a seat somewhere about here, so we may sit down and chat till they come."

While thus speaking, the two men slowly advanced to the garden-bench behind which I was concealed; I was rejoiced that they thus kept to the very identical spot agreed upon the previous evening, and where I could therefore hear everything that passed: for I was scarcely four yards distant from the bench where Matthew and Wilson now deposited themselves.

"So your master makes his-self precious sure," said Matthew, "that he'll be able to put things all right with young missus when once he gets her into his power?"

"Let him alone for that," replied Wilson. "There never was such a chap for cajolery; and as Miss Maitland was desperate in love with him, and has been so ill and melancholy ever since that affair at Walmer, which I told you about, there's no doubt she can be won over. All her fortune is at her own disposal when she marries, even before she comes of age. *That* point my master has taken deuced good care to ascertain. All I know is that I do hope he will succeed: for I think it's his last chance."

"But mind you," observed Matthew, "young

missus has got a good spirit of her own—although it isn't for me to throw cold water on your master's hopes——"

"Oh! never mind a woman's spirit when she is in love," interrupted Wilson. "She soon becomes tractable. Ah! what a clever chap that master of mine is; and it's odd too—but when I first knew him he swindled *me*. However, I got well paid afterwards: for there was a precious queer affair took place at Ashford, all brought about by that clever young puss Mary Price, and in which I had a hand to bring about his exposure: for at that time I was against him."

"How was it, then, that you got into his service again?" asked Matthew.

"Oh, I met him a very few weeks after that affair in London; so we got talking together, and somehow or another made up past matters. For the fact was I had had a good sum of money given me by a certain Mr. Appleton in the Ashford affair, and having run through it all in no time, I was brought down low again; and my master, wanting a clever fellow, we soon made a bargain with each other. Then he got a lot of money by some means—I don't exactly know how—and we went to Brighton in the course of time, where he paid his way and so passed for an honourable and respectable nobleman. There it was he fell in with your young mistress."

"But what was that you were telling me yesterday about your having got Mary Price carried off so nicely, that if she hadn't managed to escape, it would have been all right with your master and young missus at Walmer?"

"Oh, ah!" exclaimed Wilson, "that was capitally done at the outset; but through the negligence of the chaps whom I engaged to hold her in safe custody, the thing totally failed. I must tell you that after the Ashford affair, when I was knocking about in London before I fell in with my master again, chance threw me in the way of a couple of queer characters called the Bulldog and Sawbridge; and happening to speak about Ashford, they told me they belonged to that town, and had a place there. So when the other day my master and I resolved to spirit Mary Price away from Kingston Grange, I bethought myself about those two chaps—lost no time in cutting across to Ashford on the chance of finding them—and was lucky enough to fall in with them at once. It was all through a letter that Mary Price wrote to that Mr. Appleton in London, which made my master and me decide upon locking her up for a time; and I don't know but what *he* wouldn't have resolved upon something worse—you understand me—only I wouldn't listen to *that*; and so it was agreed that no harm should be done to the girl during her captivity."

"I am sure, for my part," observed Matthew savagely, "I shouldn't mind wringing her neck for her—But, hark! here they be."

At this moment footsteps were heard approaching; and almost immediately afterwards Wilson and Matthew were joined by the gardener's grandsons. They at once entered on the business for which they had met.

"Well," said Harry, "my brother Ned has spoke to me about it; and if it's a hundred pounds apiece, I am not the man to refuse a good offer. But what about the payment of the blunt?"

"Half down at once," replied Wilson, "and t'other half the moment your young mistress is put into the carriage which will be waiting to receive her."

"And when is it to be done?" demanded Henry.

"To-night, if possible," returned Wilson. "When once we are all agreed, there is no use in delaying it: and besides, my master is getting impatient."

"Well, there's no reason why it shouldn't be done to-night," observed Harry. "But now, what's the plan?"

"Matthew and I have talked it all over," answered Wilson; "and from what he has told me, I don't think there will be overmuch difficulty. In the first place, the carriage will be waiting in the road, about a quarter of a mile from the house, at twelve o'clock to-night punctually. Matthew will be on the alert to let you two brothers and me into the house just about the same time. As Miss Maitland is in the habit of locking her chamber-door, we shall at once force it open without any hesitation; and as we may expect she will scream out, Matthew undertakes to silence the women-servants, while I shall be posted at Mary Price's door ready to burst in and with a pistol at her head prevent her from kicking up a row or going to her mistress's help. You two brothers will look alive and shove a gag into your young mistress's mouth, if she shouldn't faint—which perhaps she will, as most women do when terribly frightened. Then you will lose no time in hurrying her off to the carriage. There you will find my master, who will give you each the rest of your money; and I shall settle with Matthew at the house. Now, does this plan look like one that can be carried out?"

"I don't see any way of bettering it," replied Harry; and a similar opinion was expressed by his brother Edward.

"Well and good," said Wilson. "Now give us your hands. Not to shake, I don't mean," he added, laughing; "although we may as well do that too, to clench the bargain. But here's three little parcels, and each one contains fifty sovereigns. That's for you, Matthew—that's for you, Henry—and this is for you, Ned. And now we needn't wait here any longer, as everything is thoroughly understood."

The four men accordingly moved away from the place where this conference had been held; and in a few minutes I sped back to the house, where my mistress was duly on the alert to let me in. I explained to her everything I had overheard in respect to the night's plan; and I was rejoiced to perceive that her spirit appeared to be rising in proportion to the amount of fortitude required for encountering the explosion of the atrocious plot.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE PLOT AND ITS RESULT.

The household retired to rest, as usual, at about half-past ten o'clock: and in pursuance of a previous understanding with Miss Maitland, I stole down from my own chamber at about eleven and proceeded to her's. There we locked ourselves in: and the pistol-case being produced, I soon convinced my mistress that I had well profited by the lesson received from the gunsmith in the morning. Having loaded the

pistols, I said, "We had better dispose of the light in such a manner that it shall not be visible through the window, but will yet remain available for us when the crisis comes."

We accordingly drew the curtains as closely as possible over the casement; and placing the light in the grate, still farther shaded it by means of a chair with shawls hung over the back.

"Now, Miss Maitland," I said, "we had better be prepared in case they should happen to come before their time:"—and thus speaking, I handed her one of the pistols. She took it with a firm grasp; and I was pleased to observe that there was an air of decision about her which showed that she was not likely to fail when the moment of peril should present itself. She looked at me as I clutched the pistol which I had reserved for myself; and I could perceive that she also was satisfied on observing that I was calm, collected, and resolute.

"You are a perfect heroine," she whispered; "and if it were not for you, I feel assured that I should have lost all courage and spirit entirely."

"I am convinced you will sustain yourself to the end, Miss Maitland," I responded; "for depend upon it, by this bold and determined attitude which you are about to take to-night, you will convince *that individual*,"—for I never liked to name him in her presence,—"*that he has nothing to hope and expect at your hands; and henceforth he will leave you unmolested.*"

"But if these villains whom we may now soon expect," observed Miss Maitland, "should have recourse to violence and persist in dragging me off—perhaps yourself with me—what course shall we adopt? Shall we suffer ourselves to be torn away, and trust to the police outside to rescue us?"

"Decidedly not," I answered, in a firm and resolute voice. "I only suggested the placing of the officers there as a last precaution——"

"What would you do, then?" inquired my mistress, gazing upon me in a manner which showed that she more than half anticipated my response.

"Miss Maitland," I replied, "if those villains have recourse to violence, rest assured that I shall not have purchased this weapon for nothing. You do not think that, so far as I am concerned, I would permit the chance of your being hurried away,—perhaps in spite of the officers,—and doomed to heaven only knows what fate!"

"Your resolution is not lost upon me, Mary," returned my mistress; "and mine own is identically the same."

"Hush!" I said: "we must speak no more; for Matthew will be stealing forth, and he might creep up to this chamber-door to assure himself that all is still."

We accordingly remained silent, seated together side-by-side near the fire-place, with our faces towards the door, and each holding a pistol in the right hand. I could not help feeling that it was indeed a strange position in which to find myself,—a strange position also for that young and beautiful lady to be placed in; and I inwardly prayed that the issue of the adventure might be as successful as we hoped and anticipated.

Presently the creaking of the stairs distinctly met our ears; and we exchanged significant looks, as much as to imply our conviction that this was Matthew stealing down to give his confederates admis-

sion. We sat perfectly silent, not moving a limb, lest the rustling of our dresses should catch his ears. In about a minute that creaking sound again reached us, and we knew it could be nothing else than what we fancied. Then all was still again. Miss Maitland now looked at her watch: it wanted ten minutes to midnight.

"In a quarter of an hour perhaps," thought I to myself, "the result will be known;"—and then again, for the hundredth time, did I take a quick mental survey of all the circumstances of our position, the precautions adopted, and the chances of a favourable issue. I experienced but little dread as to the sequel, and not for a moment did my fortitude abandon me.

Nearly ten minutes had elapsed, when I suddenly made a sign to my mistress; for the sounds of footsteps ascending the staircase, had distinctly met my ears. We then with one accord rose to our feet, and stood close together, side-by-side as we had been sitting. I glanced at Miss Maitland—our eyes met—and the looks we exchanged, conveyed the mutual assurance of our unabated fortitude and determination. We both were well aware that now the sudden crashing in of the door might every instant be expected; and although we could hear our hearts palpitate as distinctly as the ticking of a clock, yet these were no signs of wavering courage, but merely of a breathless suspense. Miss Maitland was pale as death: but her lips were firmly compressed, and there was a light shining in her eyes that bespoke the resuscitation of a naturally lofty spirit. I also felt that I was pale, and my own lips were held tight with the firm resolve that animated me throughout.

We heard certain low sounds—scarcely audible indeed: but still we did hear them—the sounds of feet treading lightly on the carpet in the landing without, and the slight rustling of garments. Then there was another pause: and then, suddenly as the thunder breaks forth from a storm-cloud, did the door of the chamber crash in with terrific violence. Indeed, it was burst completely open in an instant:—quick as the eye can wink, was it done!

At the same moment I kicked the chair away from the front of the fire-place, so that the light in the grate streamed fully into the room: and never shall I forget the sudden expression of consternation and dismay which appeared upon the countenances of the two brothers, as they found themselves confronted by Miss Maitland and myself, our outstretched arms levelling the gleaming weapons at their heads.

"Perdition!" ejaculated Harry: and he fell back aglath.

At that imprecation which burst from his lips, there was the quick rush of footsteps, as of a man precipitating himself down the stairs of the upper flight: and he cried, "Mary Price is not there!"

"No—she is here," said I, as Wilson made his appearance behind the two brothers in the doorway.

For a moment he also was confounded; and taking advantage of the pause, Miss Maitland said, "Everything is known—all is discovered—the police are outside the house—and you will do well to depart."

"No—that's all nonsense!" instantaneously exclaimed Wilson. "If the police had been set to

work, they would be *in* the house and not *outside*. We won't be humbugged. Let us seize upon them both!"—and he endeavoured to urge the two brothers forward.

"Advance another step," I cried, "and we will fire. Your master, who is with the carriage, is already arrested."

This strategic thought on my part produced an instantaneous effect.

"Then if that's the case, it's all over," exclaimed Wilson: and he disappeared from the doorway. The two brothers precipitated themselves after him; and we heard them dash madly down the staircase.

"Now let us see what has become of Matthew," said I to Miss Maitland, so soon as the sound of the retreating footsteps had ceased to reach our ears; and as I spoke I placed the pistol upon the mantel-piece, observing, "Heaven be thanked that there was no necessity to use it!"

Miss Maitland likewise laid aside her weapon; and throwing her arms round my neck, she embraced me in enthusiastic gratulation at the result of our adventure. I now took up the candle, and we ascended the stairs to the servants' rooms. We first entered Mrs. Thornton's—but we found her fast asleep: she had evidently heard nothing of what was going on. We entered the cook's; and she was slumbering with the heaviness and unconsciousness of intoxication. A half-emptied tumbler of spirits-and-water stood upon a chair by the side of the bed. Thence we passed to the chamber of Janetia, whom we found wide awake and evidently much frightened. Starting up in her bed, she exclaimed, "I had nothing to do with it, ma'am—I didn't know a thing about it."

"Matthew has been here?" said Miss Maitland sternly.

"Matthew, ma'am?"

"Yes. Confess the truth!"

"Well, he has, then," said Janetia, now bursting out crying: "but he declared that if I didn't lay still I should be murdered—I assure you, ma'am, that I had nothing to do with it—I hadn't really!"

"Nor do I accuse you," answered Miss Maitland. "We know every particular, and can therefore acquit you."

Janetia was infinitely relieved by this assurance; and we at once left her. Miss Maitland now knocked imperatively at Matthew's door, and called him by his name.

"Eh, what?—who's there?" he exclaimed from inside, affecting the tone and manner of one just startled up from his sleep.

"Come forth, I say—directly!" cried Miss Maitland: "for I know that you are not in bed. Come forth, I repeat; or the constables shall be called in to drag you out."

The door was now unlocked and opened; and Matthew made his appearance looking like a person about to be led forth to the place of execution. Terror and dismay, mingled with all the signs of guilt and crest-fallen villany, were depicted upon the countenance of the wretched man; and falling upon his knees, he besought his mistress in a most piteous tone to have mercy upon him.

"Rise—I command you to rise," said Miss Maitland. "And now follow me."

Thus speaking, she descended the stairs; and Matthew catching me with nervous force by the arm, said in a low hoarse whisper, "For God's sake, Mary, put in a good word for me." I released myself from his grasp with indignation in my looks, and followed close behind my mistress,—the miserable man dragging himself slowly and painfully after us. Miss Maitland descended to the parlour on the ground-floor; and fixing her eyes severely upon Matthew, she said, "It is useless for you to deny your complicity in a most infamous conspiracy. Everything is known to me—as I have no doubt you heard me tell your confederates just now, when you hoped by shutting yourself in your room that you might possibly escape suspicion. Begone at once!—and if after the packet departs to-morrow you are found in the island, the hand of justice will grasp you. Begone, I say—wretch that has eaten my bread and conspired so treacherously against me!"

"One word, Matthew," said I. "You would do well to follow your comrades out of the back entrance: for they are gone in that direction."

I gave him this hint because I knew my mistress did not desire that he should fall into the hands of the constables posted in the front part of the house. The wretched man slunk away from the presence of the indignant Miss Maitland; and when he had departed, we went together to make fast the kitchen door by which he had given admission to the villains, and whence they had fled in a very different plight than they had anticipated at the outset of their scheme.

I passed the remainder of that night with Miss Maitland: but it was not until daylight had dawned that either of us closed our eyes in slumber. When we awoke it was at a late hour; and I was distressed to find that Miss Maitland was very ill. The excitement she had gone through was too much for her nerves, depressed and enfeebled as she had previously been for some weeks past; and I was so much alarmed that I begged her to permit me to send for her medical attendant. Janetia was accordingly despatched into the town to fetch the doctor: but she was such a long time gone that I grew uneasy,—thinking that for some reason or another she must have absconded. Miss Maitland had relapsed into a feverish and uneasy sleep: but still she did slumber;—and as three hours had now elapsed and Janetia did not re-appear, I descended to the front-door to see if there were any signs of her return. At that very moment I beheld her hurrying through the front garden; and the instant she came near enough to hear my voice, I said, "Is the doctor coming?"

"He will be here in a few minutes," she replied.

"And what made you so long?" I asked.

She at first gave one of her usual flirty and indignant tosses of the head, as much as to say that she would not be questioned by me: but probably recollecting the threat held out by her mistress should she in future give me offence, she thought it best to answer,—saying, "The doctor was called away to the prison, where a shocking case of suicide has taken place; and so I was obliged to wait for his return, as you told me I was to be sure and see him myself, and not leave any message with his people for fear it shouldn't be delivered."

"Then he is coming?" I said anxiously.

"He told me he should be here almost as soon as myself."

"Here he is!" I exclaimed as the physician at the instant made his appearance at the gate; and forgetting all about the shocking case of suicide to which Janetia had alluded, I hastened to conduct the doctor up-stairs. He was an elderly man, with a good-natured look, a bald head, and an old-fashioned tie behind, which gave him the appearance (when he had his hat on) of wearing a peruke. He was a clever practitioner, and enjoyed the repute of being the most talented in the island.

Miss Maitland awoke as we entered the room; and the doctor began questioning her as to her feelings. Of course nothing was said of the incidents of the past night; but the physician evidently suspected that she had lately experienced some powerful cause of excitement. He prescribed for her and took his departure, promising to call again in the evening.

I remained by the bedside of Laura Maitland for the rest of the day. She was evidently ill at ease both in mind and body. I did not like to question her respecting the cause, inasmuch as I could too well conjecture it. The occurrences of the preceding night had most painfully revived everything in her mind connected with the man whom she had loved so well and whose unparalleled villany had shed such a blight upon her best and purest affections. There can be no doubt that she reflected upon the transcending iniquity of this man, who, not contented with the ruin of a life's happiness which he had already wrought, had conspired to plunge her still more deeply into wretchedness and misery. At about eight o'clock sleep gradually came upon her eyes; and in a short time she slumbered profoundly.

The doctor now again made his appearance. He entered the room with the tiptoe caution of one too well accustomed to the sick chamber; and as he approached the bed I placed my finger upon my lip to imply that as my mistress slept it would be better not to disturb her. He looked at her; and perceiving how profoundly she was sleeping, he said in a whisper, "It will do her good. It is rest that she chiefly requires. I will wait a little while to see whether she awakes, because living so far away, I could not very conveniently return again to-night."

I asked the doctor if he would not adjourn to the parlour, whence I could summon him so soon as my mistress awoke: but he had already seated himself, and intimated that he would remain there for a little while. I continued standing: but he bade me not put myself out of the way for him—and so I sat down.

"I was sorry," he said, still speaking in a low whispering voice, "that I could not come up this morning the moment I was sent for; but the fact is I was engaged at the prison, where a dreadful case of suicide had occurred. It seems that a sailing-packet which came in from Portsmouth very late last night, brought a couple of Bow Street officers from London, who in consequence of some information they had received—those fellows are uncommonly clever, and one can scarcely ever guess how they do get their information—"

"Hush, sir," I said, glancing towards the couch.

"Your mistress is still fast asleep," replied the

doctor. "But what was I saying? Oh, I remember—I was going to tell you about this suicide. Well, it seems that these Bow Street officers who arrived last night, went at an early hour this morning to the lodging of a foreigner, who had been, as I understand, for the last week or so, living in a secluded part of the town: and they arrested him on a charge of forgery. So he was taken to the prison, to be kept there till the steam-packet departed for Southampton; and in the meanwhile the officers got the warrants properly backed, and so forth, by our local authorities here. Well, at about half-past nine they returned to the prison to fetch their captive: but when they went in with the gaoler, they were horrified at finding him lying on the pavement of the cell, his throat literally cut from ear to ear. He was weltering in his blood; and a razor with which he had effected his purpose, was lying by his side. So the presumption is that he had managed to secrete it about his person when he was arrested at his lodgings, and that from the very first instant he was captured he had resolved on self-destruction. There can be no doubt that the gaolers and turnkeys were greatly to blame for not searching him well when locking him up. As I am the prison physician I was instantaneously sent for: but heaven knows it was only a matter of mere ceremony—for the poor wretch was past all human aid. Indeed, so determined was the act that death must have been instantaneous. I had to wait and sign a deposition as to the circumstance, not only for the satisfaction of our own authorities, but to acquit the Bow Street officers of any neglect or want of caution on their part in respect to the prisoner, as it was clearly the duty of the gaoler and turnkeys to search him themselves. So now you know the reason I was so long ere I could come up to your mistress."

It was with a deep and shuddering interest that I had listened to the story from that point where the doctor stated that the suicide was a foreigner; and an awful suspicion having arisen in my mind, I could not help asking the name of the individual.

"His name?" responded the doctor. "From what I have heard he has gone by a dozen. But it seems that he has been forging the name of an Italian nobleman to a very great extent—and indeed at one time passed himself off as this nobleman——"

"The Marquis Visconti?" I said with shuddering apprehension: and I spoke in the lowest possible whisper.

"Yes—that's the name," replied the doctor: and at the same instant a sound like a suffocating gasp, seemed to emanate from the bed.

A wild terror shot through my brain. Oh! if my mistress were awake and had overheard all! Yet we had spoken in such low whispering accents! Starting from my seat, I approached the bed. Heavens! what were my feelings when the thought struck me that she was dead—for her face was white as marble!

"She has fainted," said the doctor, who was instantaneously by my side.

Restoratives were at hand: but it was nearly half-an-hour before my dear mistress exhibited any signs of consciousness; and frequent, as well as full of anguished uncertainty, were the questions that I put to the doctor whether there were any hope? At first methought that even *he* despaired: but

after a time his looks brightened up—and at length a long half-stifled gasp showed that life was not extinct and that Laura Maitland was recovering. She lay however for several minutes giving occasional gasps—and then remaining perfectly still, as if she had relapsed into unconsciousness. Presently she opened her eyes and gazed with a wild vacancy around her. She looked at me, and did not appear to recognize my countenance: she looked at the doctor, and a sort of terror flitted over her wan features: she looked around the room, and then slowly reverted her eyes upon my face. All in an instant she recognized me; and with a sudden effort of strength—a paroxysm of hysterical energy, as it might be called—she seized one of my hands, and carrying it to her lips, cried mournfully, "O Mary, dearest Mary!"—and then the tears gushed forth.

Ah, I knew full well what was now uppermost in her mind; and throwing myself upon her bosom, I wept piteously. Alas, alas! she had awakened while the physician was narrating his fearful story—and she had overheard all. Poor Laura! heaven knows she was but ill calculated at that moment to receive so terrible a revelation! The doctor was naturally surprised at this manifestation of excitement both on her part and on my own: but with the usual discretion of his fraternity, he asked no questions. That Miss Maitland was now very seriously—indeed dangerously ill, was but too apparent; and I was smitten with a presentiment of the worst. The doctor said that a nurse must be procured to attend upon her: but I insisted upon undertaking this duty. He remained until a rather late hour, and then took his departure, with the intimation that he should return early in the morning.

I sat up with Laura the whole night. She slept little, but talked with a wildness and an incoherency which often frightened me to such an extent that I feared it was something more than the delirium of fever and that her intellects were seriously unsettled. Several times she started up in the couch, and extending her arms towards the foot of the bed, fixed her eyes in the same direction,—exclaiming with horror depicted on her countenance, "No, no—do not come near me! Your throat is cut from ear to ear!—the blood is flowing like a torrent!—heavens, it gushes upon the bed-clothes!—O God, he is coming to seize me in his arms!"—and then with a wild cry she fell back upon the pillow, covering her face with her hands, her whole frame convulsed with a strong shudder.

This same scene occurred several times throughout the night; and each successive paroxysm was stronger than the former one. As morning approached I became so alarmed that I was almost inclined to call up Janetia and send her off to fetch the doctor: but as the distance was so great—two miles into the town—I thought I had better wait, if it were possible, until the medical man should arrive of his own accord. I did wait accordingly, but frequently experienced the utmost trouble in preventing my poor mistress from leaping out of bed. When the doctor came he was evidently much surprised to find her in this state: he had hoped that by the aid of the medicines he had given her, she would have fallen into slumber and that she would have awakened much refreshed. She did not know him; and she had ceased to recognize me. She either lay gazing with a sort of bewildered vacancy

about her—or else started up in the bed, repeating the terrible words I have already recorded. The physician of course comprehended that she had overheard the frightful narrative of the foreigner's suicide which he had related to me on the previous evening; and without for a moment suspecting the dread nature of the associations which existed in her mind in respect to that man, he naturally concluded that it was one of the images of terror which in the delirium of fever her brain conjured up. He took me aside, and gave me to understand that Miss Maitland's friends or relatives had better be written to; for that he considered her to be in a dangerous state. I conjured him to tell me exactly what he apprehended; whereupon he addressed me in these terms:—

“That your mistress has something preying upon her mind—or that she has received some cruel shock—is but too evident. Of course I do not seek for information upon the subject: it is not for me to pry into family secrets. But her condition alarms me. If this excitement continues, it may end in the permanent derangement of her intellects; and it is likewise to be apprehended that the fever will terminate fatally. But much depends upon the actual state of her mind, and to what extent these ravings are the mere delirium of fever, or the unnatural excitement of a mind that is diseased.”

I was cruelly afflicted at all I thus heard: for the doctor's words appeared to confirm the presentiment of evil I had already entertained. I however lost no time in writing to Mrs. Kingston; and I despatched the letter by the steam-packet which left St. Peter's Port at ten o'clock for Southampton. I had a great mind to write also to Mrs. Maitland at Brighton: but I thought it better to wait and allow Mrs. Kingston to act in that respect according to her own discretion. But four days must elapse, I calculated, ere Mrs. Kingston would arrive in Guernsey; and I trembled as I thought of what might possibly occur in the interval. My poor mistress might become thoroughly deranged; or she might die: and as there was not a soul in the house who cared for her except myself, I experienced all the responsibility of my position. Mrs. Thornton and Janetta showed every inclination to give themselves airs, instead of complying with the various instructions which I deemed it necessary to issue under the circumstances in which I was placed; but when I made them understand that Miss Maitland's friends might be expected in a few days, and that they would countenance all I did, Mrs. Thornton and Janetta considered it best to forbear from overt opposition.

During the four days that now elapsed, I had indeed a sad time of it: for poor Miss Maitland grew completely deranged—and although she was not dangerous, yet she required constant watching. By the doctor's express directions, a nurse was procured, so that if I had occasion to quit the room, Miss Maitland need not be left alone. She would not however permit any one save myself to do a single thing for her. I do not think that she recognized me, or that her mind was in a sufficiently settled state to know who I was; but persons in her unfortunate condition, often experience strong aversions as well as equally powerful likings towards particular individuals; and thus was it that my unfortunate young mistress could only be appeased

and tranquillized when I was with her. For four nights I did not go to bed; and during the days it was with difficulty I managed now and then to lie down for half-an-hour at a time: but I frequently snatched a short doze in a large arm-chair in which I sat by the bed-side. Exhaustion was coming upon me rapidly: my cheeks were pale—my eyes haggard—and I looked as ill and careworn as I was after my three weeks' captivity in the Bulldog's house at Ashford. I did sincerely hope that Mrs. Kingston would lose no time in coming: for I feared lest I myself should be prostrated on a sick bed, and thus be compelled to leave my poor mistress entirely to the mercy of the nurse and the servants. My hope was not however disappointed; and thus my apprehensions were not realized.

Late in the evening of the fourth day, Mr. and Mrs. Kingston made their appearance; and cruelly shocked they were at the state in which they found their unfortunate relative. Miss Maitland did not recognize them: she however seemed pleased when Mrs. Kingston approached the bed;—but on catching a glimpse of the Squire, she shrieked out wildly, exclaiming, “Take him away, take him away! The blood is streaming from his throat!” Alas, poor young lady! in the confusion of her ideas she mistook the honest-hearted Mr. Kingston for the suicide adventurer.

On the following day I related to Mr. and Mrs. Kingston every thing which had occurred in respect to Charles Leroux. I had previously given a few hurried particulars in my letter: but now I described every incident with minuteness. A serious consultation with the medical man next took place; and in order that he should be fully enabled to give a decisive opinion upon Miss Maitland's case, Mr. and Mrs. Kingston decided upon telling him everything which related to her. He therefore now learnt the secret of Laura's unhappy love, as well as who its object was: and he had no longer any difficulty in comprehending how the tale of horror which she had overheard, should have produced such a terrible effect upon her. In a solemn but firm voice he declared it to be his opinion that Miss Maitland's reason had experienced a shock—that her intellects were seriously disordered—and that the only course to be pursued was to place her under the care of some medical gentleman noted for his skill in the treatment of the insane. Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, as well as myself, were greatly shocked at this announcement: but little though we knew of psychological matters, we could not help recognizing the justice and the truth of the doctor's opinion. It was therefore resolved that Mrs. Maitland at Brighton should be communicated with at once, as she was Laura's nearest relation; and it was not to be supposed that under the painful circumstances which now existed, she would persevere in her rancorous animosity against her niece.

For the first two days that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston were in Guernsey, our attention was so completely absorbed with all that concerned poor Laura, that I found not a moment's leisure to converse on other matters with Mrs. Kingston: but in the evening of the second day, during a brief interval of sound sleep into which Miss Maitland fell, my late mistress and myself had an opportunity to discourse. We were seated in Laura's bed-chamber; and the nurse was absent from the room at the time.

"I hope, my dear madam," I said, "that the young ladies and dear little Kate are all well?"

"Perfectly well," answered Mrs. Kingston; "and I can assure you that Kate missed you sadly. Indeed, Mary, it is no compliment to tell you that every one at the Grange missed you. We were all sorry when you left: but now, my dear girl, you will have to come back to us again."

"May I not be permitted to accompany my dear mistress wheresoever she goes?" I asked: "for much as I should desire to return into your service, ma'am, yet I cannot think of deserting poor Miss Maitland."

"You see, Mary," responded Mrs. Kingston, "the absolute necessity which exists for placing my unfortunate cousin in a private lunatic asylum: for indeed there is no use in mincing the words—and *that* is the sad and solemn truth. I once had a female friend who, becoming deranged, had to be put under restraint: and the doctor to whose care she was consigned, would not permit her to be attended in his asylum by her own servants. Therefore I feel convinced—judging by the reasons given by the doctor to whom I am alluding—that it will be deemed inexpedient for you to remain attached to the service of poor Laura. In her condition it will be found necessary to separate her from all persons whose presence may tend to keep alive painful associations and images in her mind. Besides which, the servants in asylums are tutored to the proper treatment of the deranged, and know exactly how to bear themselves towards the afflicted patients. Therefore, my dear Mary, you must at once renounce the hope of remaining with Laura; and of course you will return to your place at the Grange."

"Under these circumstances, Mrs. Kingston, I thankfully accept your kind proposal. May I ask how my brother and sister are getting on? I have heard from the former two or three times; and he spoke of the kindness you have shown him and Jane—having them both up to the Grange to pass the day with Mrs. Taylor and little Kate, and making them such handsome presents; for all of which, my dear madam, I beg to express my heartfelt gratitude."

"There is no occasion, Mary: I promised you that I would see to their welfare. Your brother William is a very nice lad, and Mr. Sands speaks highly of him. As for your sister Jane, she has become a great favourite of mine. But there are other persons with whom you are acquainted at Deal, and in whom I know you took the liveliest interest—"

"The Scudders?" I exclaimed: and a strange misgiving seized upon my mind, as I saw that Mrs. Kingston's countenance assumed a serious expression—indeed a sad one—as she spoke.

"Something has happened in that quarter, Mary," she replied, her looks becoming graver still: "but knowing how deeply you felt on behalf of those persons, I thought it best that you should be kept in the dark—at least until the issue might be known; and therefore it was by my advice that your brother William said nothing to you on the subject in his letters. Now, however, that I am with you, I think it prudent to break the intelligence—"

"Good heavens, Mrs. Kingston!" I exclaimed, literally frightened. "What has happened? what

issue did you await? It must be something terrible indeed that needs so much preface!"

"Do not excite yourself, Mary," resumed the kind-hearted lady; and she took my hand as she looked earnestly and compassionately in my countenance. "You remember one day that through some thoughtless remark which poor Laura made, when at the Grange, we discovered a certain secret of your's—don't be offended, Mary: you know I mean nothing but kindness—I allude to the secret of your love—"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, a thrill of excruciating terror quivering through me from head to foot. "What dreadful things are in store for me?"—for utterly forgetting at the moment that we had been talking of the Scudders, it struck me that some evil intelligence had been received in respect to Eustace Quentin—that the ship in which he had sailed was lost—or that he had died from sudden illness—or some horror of the kind. Indeed, it never occurred to me at the moment that Mrs. Kingston could not by any means know who the object of my love really was.

"Poor girl," said Mrs. Kingston, soothingly; "I feared that it would prove a sad blow—"

"Oh! keep me not in suspense," I murmured, feeling as if I were about to faint: and never shall I forget the excruciating anguish which wrung my heart at that moment.

"In one word, dear Mary," replied Mrs. Kingston, "you must think no more of Thomas Scudder."

A feeling of ineffable relief sprang up in my soul; and Mrs. Kingston, reading it in my looks, gazed upon me with mingled surprise and delight. At length she said, "Am I mistaken, then? You do not love him?"

"You are indeed mistaken, my dear madam," I at once answered. "I have never thought of him otherwise than with a friendly interest and compassion."

"Oh, I am truly rejoiced!" exclaimed the kind-hearted lady. "You know not what I have suffered on your account. I dreaded lest the intelligence should reach you by an indirect manner, or through the newspapers—Oh, I am so glad—I am so relieved! But into what an error did I fall! I felt convinced that this man Scudder was the object of your attachment."

"No, dear lady," I hastened to reply. "Candidly do I admit that my heart is engaged and my faith plighted to one who is now absent from England—"

"Tell me no more, Mary: it is your secret, and I do not wish to pry into it. Oh, I am so rejoiced," she repeated, pressing my hand warmly, "to think that I should have been mistaken!"

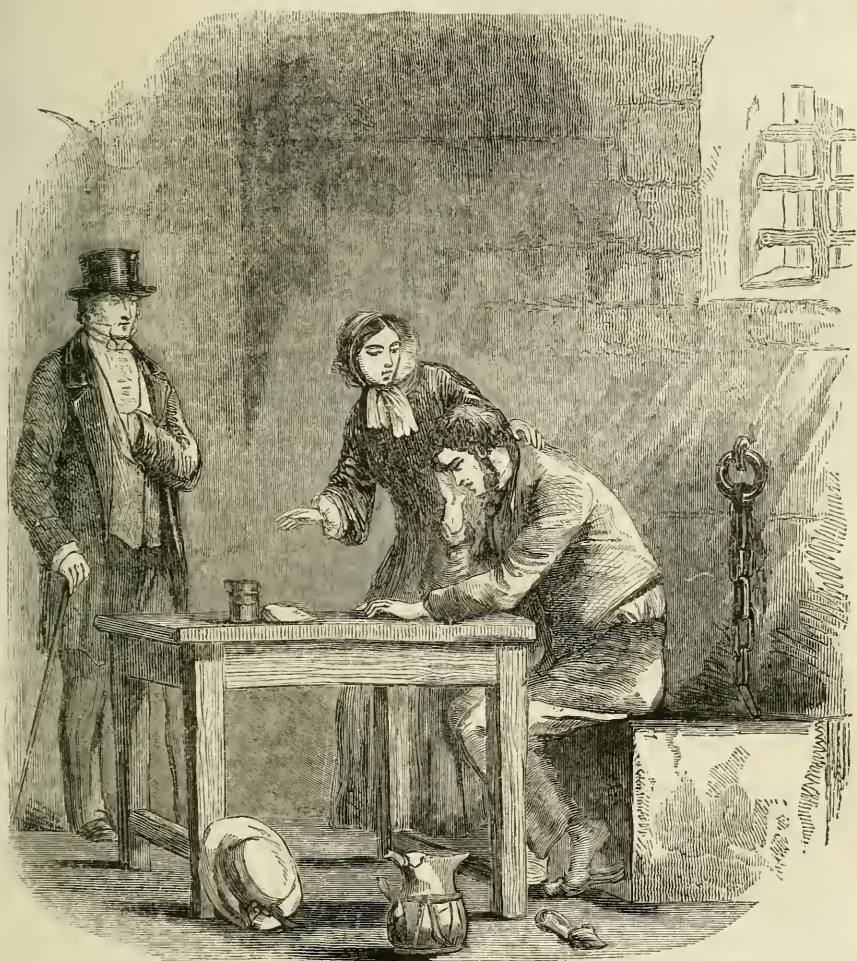
"But tell me, my dear madam, what terrible calamity has overtaken those poor Scudders?"

"Calamity?" said Mrs. Kingston, shaking her head gloomily: "it is indeed a calamity! It is worse—a crime!"

"A crime?" I echoed: and the thought instantaneously flashed to my mind that Tom Scudder had been goaded into some deed of vengeance against the ruffian John Plummers.

"Yes: a crime—a terrible crime, Mary—a foul murder!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, electrified by the startling intelligence; and then experiencing another



blow like a shock, I sank back in the seat from which I had half jumped up.

"I am sadly afraid, Mary," continued Mrs. Kingston, "that all your interest and compassion were thrown away upon a very bad man. At least, a strong combination of circumstances points him out as the perpetrator of a murder and robbery which have excited the utmost sensation throughout that part of Kent."

"The widow's son a robber?" I ejaculated. "No, no—he cannot be. I do not think that I am so utterly ignorant in the reading of the human countenance—"

"Trust not to appearances, my dear Mary: they are so often deceitful. At all events, in the present case you have been in error when trusting to them. The Squire himself was deceived. He thought, on the occasion when at your intercession he interested himself to save the sailor from a prison, that he was a frank-hearted, honest, straight-forward kind of

man: but circumstances have too fatally shown the reverse."

"I am indeed distressed to hear this," said I. "Alas for human nature! who will ever again put confidence in the honest expression of a countenance? But do tell me, dear lady, the particulars of this tragic story?"—and still there was an indistinct idea floating about in my mind, that after all it might turn out different to what was supposed in respect to Tom Scudder.

"The person of whom we are speaking," continued Mrs. Kingston, "is at this moment lying in Maidstone gaol, under the serious charge of robbery and murder, perpetrated upon that very individual who appeared against him before the Mayor on the occasion when my husband interfered—"

"Plummers—John Plummers!" I ejaculated. "Ah, my dear madam, knowing all that I do know, I cannot say that I dare discredit the possibility of a deed which must have been one of vengeance. But

that the widow's son should have plundered his victim, is what I can scarcely put faith in!"

"And yet it is so," rejoined Mrs. Kingston. "The murdered man's pockets were turned inside out: the very lining of his coat was ripped open—doubtless in search of whatsoever he might have concealed there. It appears indeed from some evidence which has transpired, that he had about him a considerable sum of money for a man in his situation, on the night when the terrible deed took place. He had also a watch—and that had disappeared. In short, his person was completely rifled."

"Heavens! these are indeed the saddest tidings. But how long ago did the crime take place?"

"I remember—it was on the very night before you and Laura left the Grange: for the news reached us on the same day that you did leave—indeed, about an hour or two after you had taken your departure. Then, having all along suspected that this man Scudder was the object of a sincere affection on your part, I enjoined Mr. Sands, who called during the day, to tell your brother William not to write to you on the subject. A few days afterwards, when I had your brother and sister up to the Grange, I repeated this advice from my own lips. I did not tell William the exact motive, but gave him to understand that as you evidently felt an interest in the sailor and his mother, it would be needless to distress you with an account of what had happened. I thought and hoped that in the remote seclusion of this habitation in Guernsey, the intelligence was but little likely to reach you by any indirect means: and it appears that my calculation proved correct."

While Mrs. Kingston was thus speaking, I was reflecting profoundly upon all she had previously said.

"But what circumstances," I inquired, still thoughtfully, "were they that tended to fix the crime upon Thomas Scudder?"

"It would appear," answered Mrs. Kingston, "that in the evening of the night during which the crime was perpetrated, Thomas Scudder was at a public-house, drinking with a Deal hoveller of the name of Philip Johnson—"

"I know it. Proceed, dear madam."

"You know it? And how singular you speak! What are you thinking of, Mary?"

"I will tell you presently. Pray proceed."

"Well, it appears then, that at the same public-house, and on the same evening, Plummers was drinking likewise; and he displayed his money in a vaunting manner, and at the same time endeavouring to provoke Thomas Scudder with the insults and taunts which he threw out. Scudder evidently felt keenly on the occasion, and had much difficulty in restraining his rage: but he went away with an abruptness that was ominous enough. On the following morning John Plummers was found murdered on the Sand-hills, not very far from Sand-down Castle. His person was rifled, as I have already told you. Suspicion naturally fell at once upon Scudder, and he was immediately apprehended. He of course denied the charge: but his former altercation with Plummers, for which he was fined by the Mayor—the threats he had been heard to utter in respect to him—and the known animosity which he bore towards that individual, tended to fix the crime almost beyond the possibility of doubt upon the ac-

cused. It does not appear that any considerable sum of money was found on the person of the prisoner: nor were any traces of the crime betrayed by his clothes. The Coroner's jury however considered the evidence strong enough to justify a verdict of *wilful murder*, and the general opinion seems to be that he was the guilty individual. I think it will appear so, too, when his trial takes place—which it will do in a few days: for the Spring Assizes are now being held. By the bye, I forgot to observe in giving you the details of this horrible tragedy, that the weapon with which the deed was perpetrated, was found upon the spot where the victim himself lay stiff and cold, weltering in his blood. I think, if I recollect right, it was a clasp-knife, of a murderous kind—with a long ghastly blade, dagger-shaped at the point —"

"Oh!" I ejaculated, in a manner which again made Mrs. Kingston contemplate me with surprise and curiosity. I thereupon, without further delay, communicated to her all that I had been revolving in my mind; and as I went on speaking, she listened with a deepening interest blended with astonishment.

"What you have said is most important—most remarkable," observed Mrs. Kingston, when I had done speaking. "We will consult the Squire at once."

Miss Maitland still continued to slumber; and the nurse was summoned to remain by her bedside, while Mrs. Kingston and myself descended to the dining-room, where the Squire was seated. To him I repeated everything I had just told Mrs. Kingston; and he was as much struck with astonishment as she had been.

"You must leave Guernsey to-morrow, Mary," he said, after having reflected for some minutes. "I suppose you won't mind travelling alone as far as Maidstone? I will give you a letter to a friend of mine there, who is a Justice of the Peace, and who will put you in the way of what is best to be done under existing circumstances. Besides, he is an excellent, benevolent man—his wife is a kind-hearted woman—and you will find a home with them as long as your presence is necessary at Maidstone."

"After which," added Mrs. Kingston, "you must come on to the Grange, where we shall perhaps be by that time: but if not, I need scarcely tell you that Mrs. Taylor will give you a very welcome reception."

On the following day, furnished with the promised letter and a liberal supply of money from Mr. Kingston, I took my departure from Guernsey. I could have sincerely wished to remain with Miss Maitland until my services were no longer available: but under the imperious pressure of these new circumstances which had transpired, I yielded to the necessity of separating from my young mistress thus abruptly. She appeared to recognize me as I embraced her at parting, and endeavoured to detain me: for as I had on my bonnet and shawl, she seemed to have an intuitive feeling that I was leaving her. Alas, poor Laura!

CHAPTER C.

THE TESTS OF EVIDENCE.

I EMBARKED on board the steam-packet, and arrived in the evening at Southampton. Thence I travelled by the night-coach direct up to London: for I was resolved not to lose any time in the business which I had now in hand. In the metropolis I was enabled to lie down for a couple of hours at the hotel next door to the coach-office where the stage put me down; and though but little refreshed with so short an interval of repose after the fatigues of travelling, I hesitated not to pursue my way forthwith to Maidstone. It was in the evening when the coach entered this town; and I inquired for the residence of Mr. Baldwin, the gentleman to whom I bore a letter of introduction. He was well known in the place; and leaving my luggage at the coach-office, I followed a man who offered to guide me to that gentleman's abode.

It was a handsome house, situated just outside the town; and a livery-servant opened the front door. Mr. Baldwin was at home; and the footman showed me into a little breakfast-parlour, while he took the letter to his master, who in a few minutes made his appearance. He was a very old gentleman, with hair as white as snow, and a benevolent countenance. He bade me be seated; and then sitting down himself, said that he learnt from his friend Mr. Kingston's letter that I had something of importance to communicate, which he was now ready to hear. I thereupon recited to Mr. Baldwin all that I had previously narrated to Mr. and Mrs. Kingston; and he was much struck with the information I thus gave him.

"You have come in time," he said: "for the Assizes will commence the day after to-morrow: I must compliment you on the rapidity with which you have travelled. You are doubtless much fatigued? Indeed, your looks show that you are: but we will see if we cannot make you comfortable. You are a good girl—a very good girl; and Mr. Kingston speaks of you in the highest terms. Have you brought any luggage with you?"

I answered that it was at the coach-office. Mr. Baldwin immediately rang the bell, and ordered the footman who answered the summons, to send at once and have my boxes brought to the house. He then took me into the parlour where Mrs. Baldwin—a kind old lady—was seated: and he forthwith made her acquainted with the leading points of the tale I had told him. The old lady reiterated the compliments which her husband had already been pleased to bestow upon me, and then conducted me up-stairs to the housekeeper, to whose care she confided me. Supper was soon brought in; and when I had partaken of refreshments I was shown to a comfortable bed-room, and slept soundly until morning.

I arose as thoroughly invigorated as if I had not gone through the fatigues of travelling such long distances in so short a space; and after breakfast, which I took with the housekeeper—she and I being alone by ourselves—I was summoned down stairs to a parlour, where I found Mr. Baldwin in company with another gentleman. This latter was introduced to me as Mr. Atkinson, the solicitor who was conducting the prosecution against Thomas

Scudder. To this gentleman I had to repeat my tale again; and it is now necessary that I should inform the reader of the precise nature of the evidence I was thus enabled to give. I explained how I was at Mrs. Scudder's cottage on that very evening when her son Thomas was at the *Jolly Turs* public-house, drinking with Philip Johnson after the bargain they had just struck in respect to a share of the boat. I stated how Thomas Scudder, on returning to his mother's house, informed her of what had taken place with Plummers in front of the bar—and how when Plummers had vauntingly flashed his money about, he was told to beware of two ill-looking fellows who had just come into the public-house to obtain some drink. I did not forget to describe how emphatically Thomas Scudder had declared his intention of thenceforth treating all the provocations of Plummers with utter contempt; and I observed there was such an air of honest sincerity and profound conviction in all he said, as well as in his looks, that it was difficult to conceive how he could possibly have altered his mind so soon afterwards. Then I came to the most important part of my narrative—how, as I proceeded along the beach in the dark, I overheard a portion of a conversation between two desperate villains known as Ben the Bulldog and Nick Sawbridge; and I repeated certain observations which they made. The Bulldog had on the occasion said, "Money is what we want, and money we must have;" whereupon Sawbridge had demanded, "Has nothing struck you, Ben?"—to which the Bulldog's reply was, "To be sure it did. But let us go farther down the beach to talk, as people may be passing by here, for it's close to the pathway."

"Now, gentlemen," I added, addressing myself to Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Atkinson, "I have no doubt that if Thomas Scudder be asked to describe the two ill-looking men to whom allusion was made at the public-house, he will, if he recollects them sufficiently, indicate the two of whom I have spoken. If this be the case, can we possibly doubt that the vaunting manner in which Plummers displayed his money suggested the idea to which Sawbridge and the Bulldog alluded on the beach, and to discuss which they removed farther off from the pathway? But there is still another point on which it strikes me I can throw important light. It was but a short time before the murder, that I happened, under peculiar circumstances which I will presently describe, to see a clasp-knife of a very hideous description in the hands of the Bulldog."

I then proceeded to relate as many of the particulars of my captivity as was necessary to account for my being in the den of those villains at Ashford; and I described how the Bulldog had one day produced a bible and a clasp-knife in the manner already known to the reader.

"Your evidence is indeed most important, Mary Price," said Mr. Atkinson; "and although retained to prosecute the accused, it will give me infinite pleasure to see his innocence established."

"I thought, friend Atkinson," said Mr. Baldwin, "that the best course would be to let you hear all Mary Price had to say,—well knowing that if after having heard her, you viewed the matter in the same light as myself, you would abandon the prosecution."

"To be sure—not a doubt of it!" exclaimed Mr.

Atkinson. "Now, Mary Price, write down upon a piece of paper as exact a description as you can of the clasp-knife which you saw in the possession of this villain the Bulldog."

I did as I was desired; describing the weapon as having a buck-horn handle, with a long blade terminating in a dagger-shaped point, and having a spring at the back to hold it open and thus render it available for any murderous purpose to which the desperate enterprises of the owner might lead him to put it. When I had finished writing the description, I was about to hand the paper to Mr. Atkinson: but he waved me back, saying, "No, no—Mr. Baldwin will take charge of that document for the present. But you have something more to write; and you can do it on the same sheet. Put down now as accurate a description as you can, of the two ruffians you have been speaking of."

This I accordingly did; and I knew Sawbridge and the Bulldog too well not to be able to delineate them with the utmost fidelity.

"Now, Baldwin," said Mr. Atkinson, "look that paper up in your desk till I come back. I shall not be half-an-hour absent."

As soon as Mr. Atkinson had quitted the room, I said to Mr. Baldwin, "I feel very anxious to know, sir, where the unfortunate mother of the accused prisoner is. I have little doubt that she is in this town, so as to be near her son to see him as often as the gaol regulations will admit, and administer such consolations as under the circumstances may be possible."

"I happen to know that she is in the town," answered Mr. Baldwin: "for as one of the Justices of the Peace, I signed her permission to visit her son every day. I have no doubt we can very soon ascertain where the poor woman lives. But it would be unwise to buoy her up with hope until we see the result of the proceedings that we are taking with Mr. Atkinson. However, that no time may be lost in relieving the poor woman's mind of her horrible affliction—I mean, supposing things turn out as we anticipate—I will cause immediate inquiries to be made as to her whereabouts."

Thus speaking, Mr. Baldwin rang the bell; and when the footman made his appearance, he said, "Go up to the gaol and ascertain if any of the turnkeys happen to know where Mrs. Seudder, the mother of the prisoner of that name, is residing in Maidstone. If they don't know, let one of them go and ask the prisoner himself. No reason is to be given for the inquiry; and the name of Mary Price is especially to be kept in the back-ground."

The domestic quitted the room to execute this commission; and soon afterwards Mr. Atkinson re-appeared, accompanied by a man dressed in a sailor's garb, and whom I thought I had seen before. A moment's reflection reminded me that this was none other than Philip Johnson, the hoveller who came to fetch Tom Seudder away to strike the bargain for the boat on the last evening that I was ever at the widow's house—that evening which, in its combination of varied circumstances, had plunged the unfortunate man into such an awful predicament of danger. Philip Johnson did not recollect me; or if he did, showed not that such was the case.

"Now sit down, my man," said Mr. Atkinson. "This person, Mr. Baldwin, is one of the witnesses for the prosecution."

"And sorry enough I am," observed Johnson, who was a straightforward honest man, as most of the Deal boatmen are, "to be mixed up in this orkard affair: for I liked poor Tom Seudder uncommon well, and it looks to me like a dream that he should have done such a thing."

"Answer me a few questions," said Mr. Atkinson. "Do you recollect on that evening when you and Thomas Seudder were drinking at the *Jolly Tars*, any allusion being made to two ill-looking men who entered the place at the time?"

"To be sure I do!" ejaculated Johnson, struck by the incident. "Why, sir, it was me myself that told Plummers he had better take care of his blunt, for I didn't at all like the looks of them two fellows."

"Do you think you could recollect their persons?" asked Mr. Atkinson.

"Lord bless you, sir! such chaps as them, once seen, ain't very soon forgot. I recollect 'em both as well as if they were standing here at this moment."

"Then describe them," said the attorney.

Thereupon Philip Johnson proceeded to give a very accurate description of the Bulldog and Sawbridge, more especially of the former, whose face was so peculiar in its hideous ugliness from the circumstance of the nose being almost flattened.

"Now, Mr. Baldwin," said Atkinson, "will you have the kindness to refer to the paper in your desk, and see if these descriptions tally with those which our young friend here," alluding to me, "has given?"

Mr. Baldwin took out the paper; and as he read what I had written in respect to the Bulldog and Sawbridge, his countenance showed, even before he uttered a word, what his response would be. Having terminated the perusal, he said, "The identity in respect to each individual is most minutely complete."

"Very good," said Mr. Atkinson: then turning to Philip Johnson, he observed, "You can withdraw now. Go straight to my office, and wait till I come. Do not say a word to a soul of what has just passed here."

"May I hope, sir, that something has transpired in poor Tom Seudder's favour?" inquired Johnson, lingering at the door and turning his glazed hat over and over in his hand.

"Yes—you *may* hope, my good fellow," replied Mr. Atkinson. "But I can say no more for the present. Go and do as I tell you, and keep silent: because the business is not quite complete as yet."

Phil Johnson retired with an expression of joy upon his honest weather-beaten countenance, which indicated plainly enough how delighted he would be to hear that his friend Seudder was altogether acquitted of the foul charges of robbery and murder existing against him.

"Now, Mr. Baldwin," said the attorney, when Johnson had withdrawn, "refer again to the paper and read the description of 'the clasp-knife.'"

"I have done so," responded the Justice of the Peace.

"Is this it?" asked Atkinson: and taking a knife from his pocket, he threw it down upon the table.

"It is the same! it is the same!" I ejaculated, the moment my eyes fell upon the weapon: but the next instant I averted my looks with unspeakable

horror at the idea that the blade thereof had drunk the life-blood of a fellow-creature.

"Yes—it is the same," replied Mr. Baldwin, taking up the knife and examining it.

"Then, Mary Price," resumed Mr. Atkinson, "I have to congratulate you upon being instrumental in saving the life of this unfortunate man Scudder. His innocence is clearly apparent. I would not for worlds take such a case into court under such circumstances. The prosecution must be abandoned; and when the Judge opens the commission tomorrow, the accused will be set free, with the assurance that there is not a stain upon his character so far as this business is concerned."

The tears of joy rolled down my cheeks, and I inwardly thanked heaven for having thus a second time, and by a most extraordinary chain of circumstances, rendered me the means of saving the life of a fellow-creature unjustly accused. Leonard Percival and Thomas Scudder—these were the two names, I thought at the time, which should occupy a conspicuous part in any work that might ever be written to prove how dangerous it is to trust entirely to circumstantial evidence, and how imperiously necessary it is to abolish the punishment of death, lest an innocent person should be hurried out of this world by the hands of the public executioner. Both Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Atkinson shook me kindly by the hand, in congratulation at the success of my enterprise: and the old gentleman said, "Now run up-stairs and tell Mrs. Baldwin what has taken place. Meanwhile I will send for Mrs. Scudder; and then you shall have the satisfaction of proceeding with me to the gaol and communicating to the unfortunate prisoner that his innocence has been brought to light by your instrumentality."

I ascended to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Baldwin was seated; and she at once read in my looks the good tidings I had to impart. The worthy lady, who had taken a great interest in the affair from the very moment I made her acquainted with the circumstances on the previous evening, shared in my joy; and while Mrs. Scudder was being sent for, I sat down to write a letter to William, telling him of what had happened—how Scudder's innocence had been established—and likewise that he might expect to see me again at Deal in a few days, as I purposed to resume my place in Mrs. Kingston's service. I also wrote a letter to Mrs. Kingston herself, thinking that it might reach her ere she could have left Guernsey, as she had intended to remain in the island until the arrival of Mrs. Maitland from Brighton, or at least until some communication was received from that lady. By the time these letters were finished, Mrs. Scudder made her appearance. She was introduced to the room by Mr. Baldwin himself; and I at once saw by the poor creature's appearance, that he had as yet said nothing to clear away the dark clouds of anguish and despair which had gathered round her soul. She was changed—wofully changed: the infirmities of a dozen extra years appeared to have fastened themselves upon her—and she was evidently crushed beneath the weight of the appalling calamity that had overtaken her.

She did not even know, ere entering that room, whom she was to see there: for, as Mr. Baldwin afterwards informed me, he resolved that as it was

all my work, the satisfaction of imparting the results to those whom they so nearly concerned, should be likewise mine. I embraced the poor widow, and she was glad to see me. She thought it was for the mere purpose of condolence and kind sympathy that I had thus sought an interview with her; and she wept with an excruciating agony.

"Cheer up," I said, the tears trickling down my cheeks—but more in joy than grief: "cheer up—there is hope!"

"Ah! what do you mean, my dear Mary?" sobbed the poor widow.

"Yes, there is indeed hope," I answered, thus breaking the happy intelligence gradually, lest it should prove too overwhelming: for I knew that there is a suddenness of joy that kills as well as the suddenness of affliction.

"Do my ears deceive me? is it possible? There is hope?" murmured the widow. "Ah, Mary, you mean that you do not believe in my poor son's guilt? You know he is incapable of it—and in the goodness of your own heart you fancy that there is hope!"

"But I am sure of it," I responded, emphatically. "Yes—I am sure of it: there is everything to hope. Now prepare yourself for good tidings. Your son's innocence is certain to transpire—don't excite yourself—I have more to tell you—It is already made apparent, and the prosecution is abandoned!"

"Then may God shower down blessings upon your head, Mary Price!" said the poor widow, falling on her knees and speaking with a pious solemnity, deep and heartfelt: "for something tells me that it is through you this has been brought about!"

"Yes, it is, my poor woman," said Mrs. Baldwin. "This excellent girl has done it all. She travelled night and day to arrive in time to save your son—and she has saved him!"

I raised Mrs. Scudder from her knees, and lifted her to a chair; for she was about to faint. Mrs. Baldwin poured out a glass of wine, and made her drink it. This revived her; and then the poor widow thanked me in terms so touching, so earnest, and so full of a heartfelt gratitude, that I experienced a renewal of all the satisfaction which I had felt at Derby when having brought to light the innocence of Leonard Percival.

"Now Mary and I will away to the prison," said Mr. Baldwin. "We must not lose a moment in acquainting the innocent accused of this signal change in his position. You, my dear," he added, speaking to his wife, "will take care of this poor woman till we come back."

"Oh, pray let me accompany you!" said Mrs. Scudder, in a tone of earnest entreaty.

"I think you had better not," answered the old gentleman. "The excitement will be too much for you. I will give you a special order to pass the rest of the day with your son, when Mary and I come back: and what's more, the housekeeper shall send a basket down with things from the larder and cellar to make your hearts rejoice. Mrs. B., my dear, you will see to this?"

"That I will, with the greatest pleasure in the world," replied the old lady in a cheerful voice.

I now hastened to put on my things;—having done which I joined Mr. Baldwin in the hall, and we proceeded to the prison. The old gentleman made me take his arm, and talked to me all the way

with as much kindness as if I were his daughter. He seemed much respected in the town, judging by the manner in which hats were touched as he passed through the streets: for it was easy to tell that these salutations were not the mere servile homage paid to wealth and station, but the genuine effluence of regard and esteem for a worthy character.

On reaching the gaol, I felt a cold tremor thrill through me at finding myself in the gloomy edifice; but this sensation was succeeded by another of enthusiastic delight, at the thought of being the means of emancipating a fellow-creature from such a dreadful place. A turnkey conducted us through some stone corridors and court-yards to the cell in which Thomas Scudder was confined; and as the massive door groaned upon its huge hinges, the glance which I flung into the dungeon, showed me the object of our visit seated upon a bench, with his elbows resting on a table, and his face buried in his hands. So profound was his reverie—so absorbed he no doubt was in his dread thoughts—that he did not even hear the door open, though the sounds were audible enough: and it was not till Mr. Baldwin led me into the narrow chamber of solid masonry, looking like a stone sepulchre, that the prisoner raised his head. Then, on beholding me, he ejaculated, “Miss Price, this is indeed kind!”—and he extended his hand, adding, “I know you will take it, because I am certain that you wouldn’t come here now if you believed me guilty.”

“I do not believe you guilty—I know you are not,” was my immediate answer as I gave him my hand; while Mr. Baldwin made a sign to the turnkey to shut the door and withdraw.

Thomas Scudder was as much altered as his mother; and being so many years younger, the change that had been wrought in him: by affliction and anguish, was all the more painfully visible. His stalwart form had wasted into absolute emaciation: his hand felt painfully thin to the touch, as if every nerve and fibre could be counted: his cheeks were fleshless—his eyes sunken and hollow: he was but the ghost of his former self. His person had been neglected—his hair matted—and he appeared like a man who had lost all care for everything in this world. It is true that his countenance brightened up somewhat on beholding me: but it was with a sickly gleaming that only added to its ghastliness, producing the effect of the moonlight playing quiveringly upon the features of a corpse. But his eyes recovered all their lost lustre in a moment when I assured him so emphatically that I felt convinced of his innocence.

“This is nothing more than I expected from you, Miss Price,” he observed. “I take heaven to witness that the words you spoke to me on that memorable evening produced such an effect, that I vowed to follow your counsel——”

“Do not look back upon the past,” I said, interrupting him: “there is every hope for the future.”

“Hope!” he ejaculated: and his looks brightened up again: for he saw something in mine that doubtless convinced him in a moment I was not giving utterance to a mere bald attempt at consolation.

“Yes, there is even more than hope—there is the certainty,” I continued. “Your innocence is known—it is established—and to-morrow you will be free!”

A wild cry of joy burst from the sailor’s lips; and seizing my hand, he shook it so heartily that he hurt me. Then he grasped the outstretched hand of Mr. Baldwin, who congratulated him in a feeling manner upon this happy change in his circumstances. I thought he would have gone mad with the excitement of his feelings. He leaped and danced, laughing like a child; and then he sat down and cried for very joy. The tears trickled down my cheeks—for my heart was full; and I observed that Mr. Baldwin turned aside and brushed his handkerchief rapidly over his eyes. The prisoner started up again, snatched his glazed hat from the bed where it lay, and sent it spinning up over his head to the vaulted ceiling of the dungeon-cell. It was some minutes before he could compose his feelings in the slightest degree: but at length the wild paroxysm of joy spent itself, and he besought me to tell him how this change had come to pass, and he the while ignorant of what was going on? I soon made him acquainted with those circumstances which have already been explained to the reader; and he listened with breathless attention. When I had done speaking, he continued silent for some minutes, pondering upon all he had just heard; and then in a solemn voice and with grateful looks, he said, “The hand of Providence is in this; and you, Miss Price, have been made the angel-messenger of heaven!”

Mr. Baldwin now proceeded to inform Scudder that his mother would be with him presently, to pass the rest of the day in his society; and the worthy old gentleman bade him console himself for a little longer imprisonment of only a few hours, with the certainty that he would be released on the morrow. We then took leave of him, and returned to the house. Mrs. Baldwin had in the meantime fulfilled her husband’s instructions with regard to the basket of good things; and Mrs. Scudder set out for the gaol, accompanied by one of the men-servants, carrying the provender with which herself and her son were to celebrate the happy turn that had taken place in his circumstances.

On the following morning the Judges entered the town with the usual ceremony, attended by the Sheriff and the javelin-men; and having heard prayers read in the church, they proceeded to the Court-House. Mr. Baldwin had wished me to be present when Thomas Scudder’s case was brought before their lordships,—observing with a smile, “that I should doubtless hear myself spoken of in terms not meanly flattering.” This intimation, so far from encouraging me to accompany him, decided me to remain away; and finding that he could not induce me to alter my intention, Mr. Baldwin proceeded thither alone. About an hour afterwards he returned with the welcome intelligence that Thomas Scudder was once again a free man; and he then gave me an account of what had taken place.

It appeared that a barrister, instructed by Mr. Atkinson, had risen immediately after the Jury were sworn; and in calling the attention of the Judges to the case of Thomas Scudder, the learned counsel begged to inform their lordships that the prosecution would not be persevered in; for that circumstances had transpired to prove the entire innocence of the accused and fix the guilt upon other persons. The counsel entered into a succinct

recital of the necessary details to make the Judges understand the altered aspect of the case; and in the course of his speech, he was pleased to give utterance to the most complimentary allusions to myself. The moment he had finished, the Judges directed that the prisoner should be brought in; and when Scudder was introduced, he was not taken into the dock, but was directed to stand on the floor of the court. One of the Judges then addressed him in a feeling manner,—deploring that he should have undergone imprisonment and affliction, but congratulating him upon the fact that his innocence had been made so clearly apparent as to be utterly beyond a doubt. His lordship then told him that he was discharged, and that he left the court without the slightest stain upon his character. Scudder bowed most respectfully, and issued forth from the tribunal of justice supporting his mother on his arm. It further appeared that the Sheriff and several gentlemen present, who heard the proceedings, took Scudder and his mother into a private room of the Court-House, and there entered into a liberal subscription on their behalf; and I subsequently learnt (which Mr. Baldwin did not tell me at the time) that he himself contributed twenty guineas, having done which he bade the Scudders come presently to his house, whither he hastened back to report all that had occurred.

Scarcely had he made an end of his narrative, when the sailor and his mother were introduced, joy beaming upon their countenances. The subscription had amounted to above a hundred guineas; and the happy man informed us that he should now be able not merely to have a part share in a boat, but a vessel entirely to himself. Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin invited them to stay at their house, until the following day; but they were too anxious to get back to Deal to show their friends and acquaintances that innocence had triumphed; and they accordingly took their departure in the course of the afternoon.

I had now no longer any object in remaining at Maidstone: but Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin pressed me so to stay with them a day or two, that it would have been most ungracious to refuse. I accordingly accepted their kind proposal; and they treated me as if I had been their daughter. When I took my leave, Mrs. Baldwin made me a present of a very handsome ring; and her husband gave me a choice selection of books, all most elegantly bound. I left them with the sincerest expressions of gratitude for their kindness, and took my place in a coach bound for Ashford: for as this town is only about eighteen or twenty miles from Maidstone, I was resolved to pay a visit to Sarah on my way back to Kingston Grange.

I must add, ere closing this chapter, that before I quitted Maidstone, I perceived the walls placarded with bills, offering one hundred guineas for the apprehension of the Bulldog and Sawbridge together—or fifty guineas if only one was delivered up to justice; and the description of their persons was precisely as I had drawn it up at Mr. Baldwin's house.

CHAPTER CI.

MY SISTER SARAH.

It was the month of April; and the country was putting forth the beauties of nature. Spring had come in reality—not merely in name: for black-thorns were thickly clustered with buds, ready to burst open, and already affording a glimpse of the white blossoms inside. The lilac-trees—earliest worshippers of the Spring—were covered with half-unfolded leaves. In the orchards and gardens, the pear-trees showed their opening blossoms, giving promise of a rich garniture of luscious fruit for every bough: and the chesnut-trees had put forth their green gummy buds. Violets and primroses—anemones and cardamines, greeted the eye, and gladdened it also; for 'tis ever joyous to welcome the herald-flowers of Spring.

Altogether the weather was delicious,—and so was the scenery amidst which I passed on my way from Maidstone to Ashford. I was glad to behold the latter town again: for there is an ever-recurring delight experienced in re-visiting one's native place. I however arrived there at too late an hour on that day to proceed to Talbot Abbey; and so I took up my quarters with the kind-hearted landlady of the *Saracen's Head*, who was very glad to see me. She was already aware of the terrible crime which the Bulldog and Sawbridge had perpetrated: for I found Ashford as well placarded as Maidstone was with the bills offering a reward for the apprehension of those miscreants. On the following morning I took my place in the carrier's van which passed by Talbot Abbey, and alighted at the gates leading into the spacious grounds, in the midst of which the edifice was situated. There was now half-a-mile's walk up to the building itself; but I enjoyed the delightful scenery—the immense carpet of verdure intersected with the bright gravel road that I was threading, and dotted by numerous clumps of trees, the branches of which were rapidly putting forth their leaves. Lambs were frisking about in one direction—groups of tame deer were collected in another—and stately swans were floating upon a large piece of water in front of the house. It was a delightful spot; and the mansion itself was one of the finest specimens of old architecture adapted to modern uses, to be found in the entire county of Kent. A wide and high ascent of steps led to a portico forming the entrance: the hall door stood open; and the porter, in a gorgeous livery, sat lazily in his huge arm-chair, reminding me very much of the aspect presented by Mr. Hutton at Kingston Grange. He knew me, as I had been there before; and in answer to my question whether my sister Sarah was in the house, he said that she had gone out to walk with the three children. I asked him if it were likely she would be long? to which he replied that he had happened to overhear her say to one of the lady's-maids that she intended to walk across to Farmer Jackson's, as Mrs. Jackson was always so pleased to see Sir Richard and Lady Talbot's children. The porter added that it was therefore likely she would be a couple of hours absent, as Farmer Jackson's was a mile-and-a-half distant.

I instantaneously recollected that this was the farm on which Mad Tommy worked; and I was by

no means sorry at having thus an opportunity of seeing my poor friend, while seeking my sister at the same time. I did not exactly know the direction in which Mr. Jackson's farm lay; and on inquiring of the porter, I discovered that I had passed it just now in the carrier's van. I accordingly retraced my way along the beautifully laid gravel-walk; and issuing forth from the grounds again, pursued my course in the direction of the farm. My path now lay along the road which the van had taken, but which was little better than a mere lane, with a high hedge on either side. I had not gone very far, when I was overtaken by a gentleman on horseback. He was a young man of about two-and-twenty—very handsome—but with a half-impudent half-rakish look that reminded me of Captain Lavender and Mr. Bergamot. He was not however dressed in the same extreme of fashion as those gentlemen, but rather in a style of what might be termed elegant negligence, such as is often adopted by wealthy young men living or visiting in the country. He had on a shooting-jacket, a light waistcoat, and coloured pantaloons. His shirt-collar was turned down in the Byron style; and a black handkerchief was tied loosely beneath. He was of fair complexion, with light brown hair, and small whiskers: he had blue eyes, and fine teeth. The reader may perhaps wonder why I describe him so accurately, or how I came to notice him so particularly: but all this will be accounted for speedily.

As he overtook me, he reined in his horse with an abruptness that made me start and look towards him—when I immediately observed that he himself gave a kind of start, such as one is apt to give when suddenly recognizing a person, or else when struck by a particular countenance. Then he looked very hard at me for a few moments: but I slackened my pace in the hope that he would pass on.

"I beg your pardon if I startled you," he said, "but my horse shied at the moment."

This was not true: for he had purposely reined the animal in. I however said nothing, but merely bowed in acknowledgment of his apology, and then stood still to afford him no farther excuse for forcing his conversation upon me.

"Well, I suppose you forgive me," he continued, still looking very hard at me. "May I ask if your name is Price?"

"It is," I answered, wondering wherefore he put the query, as I did not recollect ever having seen him before.

"Ah! I thought so," observed the young gentleman. "Mary Price, I presume?"

"May I beg to inquire wherefore you ask me?" said I, coldly and distantly.

"Oh, nothing! Only I thought you must be Mary Price. I have heard of you several times. Upon my soul, you are an uncommon fine girl—an uncommon fine girl!" he repeated. "What a splendid family it must be, if you are all the same!"

I could not help gazing up at him in astonishment as he thus spoke; and I could not exactly tell whether it was merely in curiosity that he had been thus questioning me, or whether he had an ulterior object in view: for there was something peculiar in the look with which he was regarding me—not altogether one of insolence, and yet one that immediately made me avert my own eyes

again. I now stopped completely short—whereupon he walked his horse forward at a quicker pace, and I was in hope that he was about to proceed on his way. But I was disappointed; for he suddenly wheeled his animal round, exclaiming, "May I ask why I find you wandering about in these lanes? Are you looking for anybody?"—and again he eyed me in a peculiar manner which I could not altogether understand, but which somewhat troubled me: for I feared lest I should be exposed to some insult.

"I beg, sir," was my response, firmly and somewhat indignantly given, "that you will not question me. I am not acquainted with you."

"Oh!" was all he said; and wheeling his horse abruptly round again, he galloped away along the narrow road, a turning of which speedily hid him from my view.

Round that same turning, and therefore advancing towards me, almost immediately appeared Mad Tommy, with a long rake over his shoulder. On beholding me, he flung down the rake; and with joy on his countenance, rushed forward to meet me, exclaiming, "Ah, Miss Price, Miss Price! So glad to see you—so very glad to see you! Poor Tommy often think of Miss Price—never forget her—not likely, not likely!"—and he shook his head with that unaccountable mixture of inaneness and shrewdness which was wont to characterize him.

"Well, Tommy," I said, shaking his hard horny hand: "how are you getting on?"

"At Farmer Jackson's still," he replied. "Tommy likes Farmer Jackson very much. Farmer Jackson so kind and good to poor Tommy. But look here! Miss Price gave Tommy a gold sovereign—bright yellow gold; and Tommy saved up his own money too. Tommy bought this:"—and with indescribable glee, the poor idiot produced a huge silver watch, as large as a moderate-sized turnip, and of the commonest manufacture.

"How beautiful!" I said, pretending to admire it amazingly, for I saw that the poor fellow was very much pleased that I did so. "You can tell what o'clock it is now, Tommy."

"Yes: and when I take it out, I always think of Miss Price. Tommy would do anything for Miss Price."

"And I always think with gratitude of what you have done for me at different times," I answered. "But tell me, Tommy—did you see a gentleman on horseback pass you just now?"

"Oh, yes—Tommy saw him—Tommy doesn't like him. He one day hit me with his whip, and I took up a stone to pretend and throw at him: but Tommy didn't though—Tommy is not spiteful. Mr. Selden was very much frightened—never hit Tommy again."

"Oh! that gentleman's name is Selden, is it?" I asked. "Who is he? where does he live?"

"Miss Price not heard of Mr. Selden!" exclaimed Tommy, opening his eyes in astonishment. "Mr. Selden is Lady Talbot's nephew."

"Ah!" I ejaculated: and immediately did a strange misgiving arise in my soul. "Have you seen my sister Sarah this way?" I inquired.

"Not to day. Tommy only just come out of the fields—hasn't been walking along the road. But Tommy often sees Miss Sarah. Ah! Miss Sarah very high and proud—never speaks to poor Tommy



—turns up her nose at him. Not like Miss Price—not so kind to poor Tommy.”

“You often see my sister, then?”—and I was about to question the poor idiot farther: but I experienced a sudden sense of shame at the thought of sifting him in order to procure information which might either confirm, or tend to dissipate, the misgiving that a few moments before had arisen in my mind. “I must bid you good bye now, Tommy: for I am looking for Sarah.”

“Good bye, Miss Price:”—and having shaken hands with me, Mad Tommy picked up his long rake, threw it over his shoulder, and continued his way in one direction, while I pursued mine in the other. I walked rapidly on: for I was now most anxious to see my sister. There was a trouble in my mind which I could not conquer. I did not like the idea of that Mr. Selden living at the Abbey: he had the appearance of one of those gay, dissipated, reckless young men who entertain no respect

for female virtue, and who fancy they have a right to address their flatteries and their overtures to any young woman of a rank inferior to their own. I had now no difficulty to understand why he had started on catching the first glimpse of my countenance, there being a sufficient family likeness to enable him to recognize in me the sister of Sarah. That he had questioned me in the way he had done relative to my wandering about (as he called it) in the lane, was no doubt to discover whether I was in search of my sister; and as he was riding in the same direction which she had taken to go to Farmer Jackson’s, I could not help thinking that it was not altogether by accident he was proceeding that way. I struggled hard to repudiate the thought that Sarah could have listened to anything the young gentleman might have taken it into his head to say to her: but the apprehension would persist in obtruding itself upon my mind, and I could not repel it. The reader is aware that my sister was a girl of

exceeding beauty—very proud, very vain, and of a very independent spirit—too accessible, I feared, to the influence of the flatteries and compliments which a designing young man might address to her. She was now some months past sixteen; and as I have before stated, so precocious in respect to the growth of her stature and the development of her figure, that she looked older than she was. Her ideas were proportionately in advance of her years: her notions were elevated above her condition; and in short, as I continued my way, pondering upon all these things, I confess that I trembled for my sister.

In about ten minutes I reached a point where the hedgerow ceased upon one side of the road, and a railing that succeeded afforded a view of fields and groves stretching away far as the eye could reach. A gate stood open, and the marks of a horse's hoofs in the dust of the road, turned off at this gate: they were likewise visible upon the grass at the entrance of the field to which the gate led. With suspicions and misgivings agitating in my mind, every little circumstance which seemed at all connected with the subject of my thoughts, was but too well calculated to attract my attention. I stopped at the open gate, wondering whether Sarah had passed in this direction, and whether Mr. Selden had ridden after her? While I was thus reflecting, I suddenly caught sight of a little girl appearing round the angle of a grove, or copse, at a short distance, and then running back again as if disporting there. I resolved to proceed in that direction, and accordingly hurried through the field. In a few minutes I reached the angle of the grove; and on passing round it, at once beheld a sight which confirmed my previous suspicions. The three children of whom Sarah had charge, were playing together on the grass; and about twenty yards further on, my sister was standing in conversation with Mr. Selden, who had dismounted from his horse, the bridle of which hung loosely over his arm. Methought that an ejaculation burst from the lips of Sarah as she caught sight of me: but it might have been fancy. Mr. Selden leapt upon his horse, and galloping away across the fields, soon disappeared from the view.

As I approached Sarah, I saw that her cheeks were crimson: but I likewise at once read in her looks that haughty plucking up of her spirit which indicated a resolve on her part not to be dictated to, nor suffer herself to be chided by me. She kissed me with a certain air of assurance, as if she had nothing to fear, or was too independent in her actions to care for what I might say: but still, notwithstanding her haughty hardihood, there was a certain trouble and confusion about her which she could not altogether throw off.

"I knew you were in the neighbourhood, Mary," she said: "for Mr. Selden just told me that he had seen and spoken to you."

"Sarah," I answered very gravely, "I most sincerely wish that there was no such person as Mr. Selden in existence."

"There! I knew you would talk to me in this way!" exclaimed my sister. "It is very odd that you make so much of trifles, and take things so very seriously! I am sure that one ought to be constantly on one's guard to give you satisfaction."

"There can be no doubt, Sarah," was my response, "that a young female ought always to be upon her guard."

"Well, Mary, I don't think that *you* are: for you get yourself into more troubles and scrapes than any young woman I ever heard of."

"But they are never of a character, Sarah, to enable the world to form an evil opinion of me. There is but one construction which can be put upon everything that occurs to me; and that is neither dishonourable nor discreditable to myself."

"And do you mean to say, Mary, that I am different?" asked Sarah, in a tone very much like that of defiance.

"Come, my dear sister, we must not have angry words passing between us. Will you not suffer me to address you with all the sincerity of that love which I bear towards you, and of a heartfelt interest in your welfare? Now, Sarah, you must know that for you to be seen talking to a young gentleman in that manner, is calculated to do you an injury."

"Do you mean to say that if Mr. Selden chooses to have a little chat with me, I am to treat him with rudeness and ungraciousness? You must remember, Mary, that I am not regarded as a servant in the household. I should hope not indeed!" she added, with a toss of her head. "I am a nursery governess, and may almost look upon myself as a lady."

"Depend upon it, Sarah," I answered, "Mr. Selden does not regard you as such."

"Why do you keep harping upon that string? If you have come to the Abbey to read me a lecture, Mary, I do not feel disposed to put up with it."

"Let us say no more on the subject at present," I at once observed, perceiving the inutility of giving my sister an opportunity to entrench herself behind the defences which her haughty spirit threw up. "Come, let me proceed with you in your walk: for I learnt from the porter at the Abbey that you were bound to Mr. Jackson's farm."

"So I was," replied Sarah: "but the children wanted to play in the fields, and so we came here. They will be too tired to go on to the farm; and we will walk slowly back."

The three little girls of whom Sarah had the charge, were respectively six, eight, and nine years old. They were pretty children: but I soon found as we walked homeward, that they were disposed to be rather pert and forward, at least towards me—but Sarah evidently had them entirely under her control. I saw however that they rather feared than liked her; for she spoke harshly and sharply to them, and even gave the youngest a blow when she did not immediately obey her. I could not help remonstrating with my sister that she should thus strike the child for some very trivial offence: but Sarah soon gave me to understand that it was no business of mine, and I was compelled to hold my peace. She asked what had brought me into the neighbourhood; whereupon I told her that in consequence of poor Miss Maitland's aberration of the intellect, I had left her service and was returning to Kingston Grange. I also gave her an outline of what had taken place at Maidstone in respect to Thomas Seudder.

"There!" she said, with something very much like a sneer: "another adventure into which you have thrust yourself!"

"Good heavens, Sarah!" I exclaimed: "can you hus talk lightly and superciliously of the highest

duty which a person can perform towards a fellow-creature—that of establishing the innocence and thereby saving the life of an individual unjustly accused?”

“Oh, of course you could not do otherwise than you have done. But just see what dangers you get yourself into, and what risks you run. I am sure when William wrote and told me at the beginning of the year that you had disappeared most unaccountably, I thought you had been made away with.”

“And did the idea distress you?” I asked, gazing anxiously upon her.

“Why, of course it did. You mustn’t suppose that I don’t love you, because I do not like to be lectured. I was very glad indeed when William wrote and told me that you had returned to Deal:—but in Sarah’s language there was nothing like the same warmth of feeling which would have characterized William’s or Jane’s if speaking on a similar topic. “Now,” she continued, “those dreadful men who carried you off that time, as you wrote and told me, will be more bitter than ever against you for what you have just been doing at Maidstone. I really should leave other people’s affairs alone, if I were you, Mary.”

“What! and permit, for instance, a French adventurer to marry an excellent and amiable young lady? or again, to suffer an innocent man to go to the scaffold, when it required but a word to save him? You see how recklessly you talk, Sarah.”

“Well, it’s all your own business,” she observed in an off-hand manner; “and of course it is not for me to interfere in it. We are both old enough now to act for ourselves, and have no right to meddle with each other. We are launched out in the world, and are getting our own living.”

These remarks were evidently intended to show me the independent ground which Sarah was resolved to take, and whence she thus significantly warned me from any intrusion. I felt deeply pained and hurt by the whole tenour of her conduct and observations; but what could I do? or what could I say? We walked on for some little time in silence. I reflected upon the course which ought to be pursued in respect to my sister. That Mr. Selden was flattering her with his addresses, there could be no doubt: but that he intended honourably towards her, was not to be for an instant believed. His whole appearance—his looks and his language during the little I had seen of him—forbade such a hope. That my poor sister was already lost, I did not suppose. Her pride would naturally lead her to think of marriage: but what I dreaded was, that while lulled into a false security by the vows and protestations of a designing young man, she might in an unguarded moment become his victim. “She must be saved!” I said over and over again to myself, as I walked along with her towards the Abbey. But how? *that* was indeed the question! To attempt any further remonstrance with her was useless; it could only lead to a quarrel between us, and thus prevent me from having access to her. What if I were to delicately hint my suspicions to Lady Talbot? No: that would not do. Her ladyship, if she took any notice of the circumstance at all, would visit her anger upon my sister, and drive her away from the Abbey without a character,—thus ruining her on the very threshold of life. Should I en-

deavour to obtain an interview with Mr. Selden, and beseech him to spare a young creature whose good name was her only wealth? The idea was too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. Mr. Selden would laugh at me, and treat the affair with insolent levity: or else he would promise everything, without the slightest intention of keeping his pledge. Then, what was to be done? I knew not. I saw that the subject required the most serious deliberation: but I resolved to leave nothing unattempted that was necessary for the salvation of my sister.

We reached the Abbey; and I accompanied Sarah up into the suite of apartments which she and the three children occupied. These consisted of two bed-chambers, and a sitting-room where they took their meals together and where Sarah gave them instruction. She appeared to be very much her own mistress, and able to do pretty well as she liked: for she rang a bell, and when a female-servant answered the summons, she said with the air of one who had only to order to find herself obeyed, “Fanny, my sister is going to dine with me to-day; and therefore you will lay the table accordingly.”

“Very good,” replied the servant-maid, who evidently liked as little as might be the having to wait upon a young nursery-governess who gave herself such airs: and thus the domestic’s manner was only that of constrained respect, not unmixed with subdued impudence. Sarah however took no farther notice of the servant-maid; but entering the chamber where she slept with the youngest girl, she put off her walking apparel and “dressed for dinner;” putting on a frock that was more fitted for a young lady of wealth and station than herself. She also took very particular pains in arranging her hair, so that it flowed in long ringlets down upon her shoulders; and I could not help wondering that Lady Talbot should allow her to assume a toilet so entirely unbecoming her station.

Soon after dinner, which was served up at two o’clock—and a very excellent dinner it was too—Lady Talbot made her appearance. She was about thirty-five years of age—very pale, thin, and sickly—a constant invalid—and one of those languid indolent women who hate everything like trouble, and are quite content to suffer all around them to do just as they please so long as they themselves enjoy what they call peace and quietness. She was not exactly ugly, and might even have been good-looking when younger; but being always poorly, though seldom downright ill—and having a doctor who induced her to take vast quantities of medicine—she had a most unhealthy appearance which totally marred anything bordering on beauty that might once have characterized her. Her movements were slow and languid: she seemed to drag herself along painfully; and on entering the nursery threw herself upon a chair with every appearance of complete exhaustion, and as if she were about to faint. Her speech was as languid as her movements—her accents low and melancholy: she spoke as if with a painful effort, and as if her voice were laden with the despondency of a constant sense of physical debility. That she was an invalid to a certain extent, there could be no doubt: but that she had made her indisposition amount to what might be termed a settled habit, was equally apparent. What I mean is, that she never exerted herself to throw off that sense of oppression and languor, but yielded her-

self up to it; and always fancying that she was ill fell completely into a course of existence in which life is slowly and painfully dragged along, without energy,—without indeed the slightest attempt at an escape from low spirits, mental depression, and physical lassitude. There was consequently less of affectation than of confirmed habit in all this: but there could be no doubt that if Lady Talbot had resolutely determined to get well, and instead of so much physic had taken good exercise, she would not have been the constant invalid that she was. I must add that she was excessively nervous: the least noise made her start and gave her a headache. She could endure nothing that was abrupt—nothing that happened suddenly—nothing that tended to excite; doors must be shut gently—servants must tread lightly—and people must converse in subdued tones, wherever she was. She never laughed; but when she exerted herself sufficiently to smile, it was in so sickly a manner that one would have thought life was an intolerable burden, and that all the cares of the world had tended to weigh her down. Seldom giving herself the trouble to reflect upon things, she either acted from the whim of the moment, or else in a way that promised to disturb her the least: so that when she first required a nursery-governess for her children, she engaged with Sarah after languidly asking her some questions; and in the same manner would she have taken any other applicant who might have been the first to solicit the vacancy.

With such a mistress it was by no means astonishing that Sarah could do pretty well as she liked, and that she might dress as she chose without incurring the least chance of remonstrance. It was also apparent enough that if one of the children had let out before the mother the circumstance of Sarah's meeting and talking with Mr. Selden, her ladyship would desire the child not to trouble her, or else would be contented with any excuse, explanation, or denial that Sarah might think fit to give.

I may here at once state that Sir Richard Talbot was a husband very well suited for such a wife. He was an inveterate book-worm, and passed the greater portion of his time in his library. He was many years older than her ladyship—at least twenty, and looked older still. He was a large, heavy man—very much like the portraits of Dr. Johnson—slow in his movements, thoughtful in his looks, and accustomed to fits of long and deep abstraction. He was very absent, and often did the most ridiculous things. The management of his large estate he left entirely to his bailiff and his steward; but as these individuals were honest upright men, Sir Richard suffered in no way from this neglect of his own concerns and the unlimited confidence he placed in others. Two or three times a-year he went up to London for the purpose of attending book-sales; and on his return with immense packages of curious old works, black-letter volumes, and all such materials for abstruse study, he would remain more completely buried than ever in his library.

Edgar Selden was Lady Talbot's nephew. His parents were dead: he had recently on coming of age received a good fortune, chiefly consisting of money in the funds; and for the last few months he had been upon a visit at Talbot Abbey. Being fond of riding, fishing, and country sports generally,

he managed to while away the time agreeably enough for himself, and neither troubled his invalid aunt with too much of his presence, nor intruded very often on the studies of the Baronet. Being a gay, dashing young gentleman, very free and liberal with his money, and with less ridiculous pride about him than would be thought from his appearance, he was a great favourite with all the domestics at Talbot Abbey. Until his arrival, they were accustomed to complain bitterly of the dull monotonous life they led and the absence of all gaiety—as Sir Richard and Lady Talbot saw very little company; so that the presence of a young gentleman full of animation and good spirits, was regarded as quite a godsend; and thus throughout the household, the universal hope was that his visit would be prolonged for a considerable time.

Having given these explanations, I may now pursue the thread of my narrative. Lady Talbot, on making her appearance in the nursery, sank languidly upon a seat, as already described; and for some minutes she did not appear able to utter a word. She motioned Sarah to reach her a bottle of salts which stood upon the mantel, there being one in almost every room in the house ready for her use. She applied it to her nose, and then gave a long sigh as if slightly relieved from the sense of exhaustion.

"Well, Mary," she said, speaking in her slow languid tones, so that her voice was quite sufficient to chill one's spirits, "you are come to see your sister? She is a very good girl—and I am well pleased with her. She gives me no trouble, and has hitherto managed to keep the children tolerably quiet."

At this moment the youngest girl let fall a large wooden doll upon the carpet; and Lady Talbot started with a sort of hysterical nervousness: then putting her hand to her head, she sank back in her chair as if about to fall into a swoon.

"You naughty little thing," whispered Sarah in a sharp voice and with a wrathful look: "how can you make such a noise to tease your poor mamma? Now, don't cry, Miss: that will only make things worse—do you hear?"

"Don't scold her, Sarah," murmured Lady Talbot. "I dare say the poor child did not do it on purpose: but the least noise goes through my head like a dagger. You don't know, Mary, what a sufferer I am. Always ill! Indeed I cannot recollect when I was ever well. Ah! how I envy those who are in good health. But when did you come? and when are you going back again?"

I answered to the effect that I had arrived from Ashford in the morning, and intended to return by the carrier's van in the evening; but while I was yet speaking, the two elder children began to quarrel desperately for the possession of some toy which they both alike coveted; and the result was another demonstration of nervousness on the part of her ladyship—another scolding inflicted by Sarah on the culprits—and a general crying on the part of all three: as the youngest, still smarting under the rebukes she had received, joined again in the chorus raised by the other two.

"They are getting too much for poor Sarah," said Lady Talbot to me. "I am afraid she cannot manage them. I have thought so for some time: but it is such a trouble to devote one's attention to

such matters. I wish you were disengaged, Mary: you might come and preside over the nursery."

As her ladyship thus spoke, I observed that Sarah, —who was standing behind at the time, endeavouring to pacify the children,—turned quickly around with a look of mingled anger and dismay; and then she immediately said somewhat petulantly, "I am sure, my lady, I can manage them well enough by myself."

"Don't talk now, Sarah," interposed Lady Talbot. "I was speaking to your sister; and as the idea is in my head, and Mary has not raised any objection to the hint I threw out, I should be only too glad if she was to accept my proposal. I must put some one here, older than Sarah, to superintend the nursery. These children, in course of time, will become more and more unmanageable; and though Sarah does her best and has hitherto kept them quiet enough, yet you see they are beginning to break out. What do you say, Mary? It would save me a world of trouble if you could come. I don't want any character with you; and that is a great consideration with me—for I hate the annoyance of seeing persons who apply for situations."

I listened to Lady Talbot with deepening interest and delight. I could scarcely believe my ears. Of all proposals that could possibly be made to me, this was the most welcome. Of course on the one hand, I felt grieved at the idea of having to renounce my situation at Kingston Grange: but on the other hand, I was thus suddenly and most unexpectedly—I might indeed say providentially—furnished with an opportunity of saving my sister from the dishonourable designs which an unscrupulous young man had too evidently conceived towards her. Therefore the sense of duty at once became paramount; and I entertained not the slightest fear of giving Mrs. Kingston offence if I delicately described to her the peculiar circumstances under which I renounced her service. But all the while Lady Talbot had been speaking and I was thus yielding to my reflections, Sarah stood behind her mistress's chair with looks as dark and sombre as a storm cloud, yet with the fury of her eyes flashing forth like lightnings. For her discontent, however, I cared nothing in comparison with the sense of that duty which I had to fulfil towards her.

"I am sure that Mary could not possibly leave Mrs. Kingston," observed Sarah in a downright pet.

"Let your sister speak for herself, my dear girl," said Lady Talbot. "You know that I dislike too much discourse upon anything. It troubles and unsettles me."

Sarah bit her lip, and looked at me in a deprecating manner, as much as to enjoin me alike by threat and entreaty not to accept Lady Talbot's proposal. But my mind was already made up; and I awaited calmly and composedly for her ladyship to repeat the offer in direct terms.

"I hope you will not make me talk very much," she continued; "for I am sadly nervous and very weak to-day. What do you think? could you make yourself happy here? You shall have a liberal emuneration. Sarah has fifteen guineas a-year; and you shall have eighteen, because you are so much older."

"I am very much obliged to your ladyship," was my answer, "for this mark of confidence on your

part;"—and here I observed Sarah gazing upon me with all the avidity of suspense. "It is true," I continued, "that I am to a certain extent engaged to Mrs. Kingston; but I feel inclined to accept your ladyship's generous proposal."

"You can't, Mary!" ejaculated Sarah, now exceedingly pale; and as she shook her head, she frowned and contracted her brows, as much as to say that she insisted upon my withdrawing my decision.

"Well then," said Lady Talbot, this time taking no heed of my sister's interjected remark, "we may consider the matter as settled. When can you come? The sooner, the better."

I intimated that as my boxes were all at the *Saracen's Head* at Ashford, there was nothing to do but to fetch them; when I should be prepared to enter at once upon the duties of my situation in her ladyship's service.

"If you don't want to go back to Ashford for any particular purpose," said Lady Talbot, "I will send over presently and have your things fetched for you."

I expressed my thanks for this offer, which I accepted; and I begged that I might see the person whom her ladyship proposed to send, that I might give him the wherewith to pay my little bill at the hotel.

"To be sure," responded Lady Talbot. "And now," she said, "let me tell you once for all exactly what I expect you to do, and in what circumstances you are to consider yourself placed—so that as you will know your duties, I may have no farther trouble. You will consider yourself as the ruling authority in the nursery; and of course your sister will be submissive and dutiful to you. Whatever you say, must be law: and then, with such an arrangement, all responsibility will be taken off my shoulders. You and your sister will attend to the children; and as you seem such a very well-spoken young woman, I suppose you can assist in their tuition. The eldest girl must have a regular governess soon; but as I cannot yet take the trouble to look for one, you two must manage with her till accident throws a suitable governess in my way. All the menial work of the nursery is done by Fanny, who is therefore at your orders. And now I think I have nothing more to say: and indeed, I hope not—for I am very much wearied and exhausted with talking."

While Lady Talbot was thus speaking, Sarah had turned away and entered the adjacent room—leaving the door open however that she might hear what took place. Her ladyship raised herself slowly from her seat, moved languidly along towards the door, and in a few moments quitted the nursery. Sarah now came forth from the adjoining room. She was as pale as a sheet: her lips were ashy—and she was evidently quivering with rage. I was profoundly grieved to see her in this state—deeply affected to think that I should be the cause of thus angering her: but I felt that I had a duty to perform, and my mind was made up to accomplish it with firmness and resolution. She walked straight up to me; and fixing her large dark handsome eyes with all the power of their lustre upon my countenance, she said in a thick voice, "I know why you have done this, Mary: it is to be a spy upon my actions! Your conduct is infamous."

"Now, my dear girl," I said, with difficulty restraining my tears, "I hope that you do not mean to provoke words, or show an ill feeling. You ought, I think, Sarah," I added reproachfully, "to be rejoiced that you have your sister with you."

"Not under such circumstances as these," she replied, with difficulty keeping down a violent outburst of passion. "I do not want a sister to be a spy."

"So long as your actions are correct, Sarah, you cannot be afraid of my knowing them. As for the authority with which Lady Talbot has invested me, it shall not be used to deprive you of any of your own. It rests with yourself whether we shall be happy here together, or not."

"Oh! I never thought I should be treated in this way," exclaimed Sarah, now crying with very rage: and flinging herself upon a chair, she sobbed violently. I advanced to console her: but she pushed me away; and the three children stood gazing on her in meek astonishment, for they were no doubt at a loss to conceive wherefore she was crying so bitterly. They did not however advance to soothe her, as is the wont of children with those whom they really love, and whose conduct towards them has been endearing: and thus I obtained another proof that my sister's treatment of them had not been so kind as it might. All of a sudden she left off weeping—wiped her eyes with a determined haste, as if her mind were made up to some particular course—and offering me her hand, said, "Come, Mary, let us be friends; and if you are not too harsh with me, we may be happy enough."

"Friends!" I ejaculated, "are we not sisters?"—and instead of taking her hand, I caught her in my arms. But when the fond embrace in which I strained her was over, I was struck with the unpleasant conviction that Sarah was not sincere in her suddenly proffered overture of reconciliation: for her looks convinced me of this—and there was something forced in the tone in which she had spoken, as well as in the manner in which she had returned my caresses. I felt pained and grieved, but made no remark upon the subject;—and calmness now reigned in the nursery.

I obtained writing materials from Sarah, and commenced a letter to Mrs. Kingston. Although it afflicted me to have to make such an allusion to my sister, I nevertheless felt that nothing but a candid explanation should be offered to that excellent and generous-hearted lady to account for my withdrawal from her service. I therefore, in as delicate a manner as possible, informed Mrs. Kingston of my sister's exceeding beauty,—regretting that it was associated with some degree of vanity, and that she was therefore not merely exposed to temptations but accessible to their influences. I related how Lady Talbot had proffered me a situation which would enable me to act a mother's part towards my sister, and besought Mrs. Kingston not to feel offended that I placed this sense of duty above my own inclinations, which would most unquestionably have prompted me to return to the Grange. I then wrote a letter to William, telling him that I had accepted this situation for the sake of being with Sarah, as he was with Jane: but to him I did not allude in the slightest way to the real motives which had led me to enter Lady Talbot's service. By the time my letters were finished, Fanny came up to

tell me that a groom was waiting on the landing below for whatever message I might have for him. I accordingly gave the man my letters, together with some money to pay my hotel-bill; and in the evening he returned with my luggage. Thus was I duly installed at Talbot Abbey; and now, as in an earlier chapter I intimated would be the case, my sister Sarah's history began to blend itself with mine own.

CHAPTER CII.

MY TENTH PLACE.

I HAVE already observed that the children were in one sense forward and pert, and in another cowed and intimidated. This is invariably the case where children are subjected to an injudicious kind of coercion: their little feelings are wounded by harsh treatment, and break forth at intervals in rudeness and impertinence. I was resolved to introduce a new system, but not in a manner that should wound Sarah's pride or subject her to any humiliation in the presence of the children. By my own kindness towards them, I hoped to set her an example how they should be treated, and prove to her that when they did wrong their fault should be pointed out to them in mild terms of rebuke, and not visited with harsh scolding, much less chastised by blows. I also saw that the servant-maid Fanny—a young woman about twenty—had been treated superciliously and haughtily by Sarah, who had issued *commands* and never made *requests*. I at once gave Fanny to understand, by my demeanour and speech towards her, that I arrogated to myself no right to be treated as a superior; but I began at once by asking her in gentle terms "to have the kindness to do such-and-such a thing," thanking her so soon as she had done it. When she brought up the meals, I did not immediately sit down and show that I expected to be waited upon; but helped her to arrange the things, and testified a desire to save her as much unnecessary trouble as possible. Thus, in the course of a few days, the children understood me, and the maid-servant understood me: so that I began to win the affection and confidence of the little ones, and the grateful respect of the domestic.

I assisted Sarah in imparting instruction; and my sister was evidently surprised to find that, notwithstanding the education which Mrs. Whitfield had given her, I was more competent for this task than herself: for, as the reader is aware, I had been accustomed in all my places to employ my spare time in the improvement of my mind. Moreover, having been admitted to what might be termed an intimate or familiar footing with so many of my mistresses—Lady Harlesdon, Mrs. Antrobus, Mrs. Kingston, and Miss Maitland—I had not failed to profit by all that was good and valuable in their discourse, as well as by the example of their superior breeding and manners. My reading had been extensive, and almost exclusively upon subjects of useful information. I may add that I was a proficient with my needle, Lady Harlesdon having been kind enough to teach me the higher order of fancy-work, which element of instruction in that branch I had subsequently practised by myself. Thus, in most respects, I was enabled to super-

intend the studies of Lady Talbot's three children: but to Sarah was entirely left the instruction of the eldest in drawing and primary lessons in music. I did not officiously and pointedly take anything out of Sarah's hands; but beginning by manifesting a desire to render myself useful, I speedily got the main control of the studies into my own hands, save and except the lighter accomplishments just alluded to. Sarah, was naturally somewhat indolent, and I regret to add, was fond of devoting much of her time to the toilet and looking-glass. She did not therefore oppose me in my endeavours to take upon myself the principal charge of the studies; while concerning the altered system I introduced in respect to the children and in the conduct observed towards the maid-servant, she could not for very shame's sake pursue a directly opposite course.

Thus passed the first fortnight at Talbot Abbey. Meanwhile I received a letter from William, expressing his joy at the result of Tom Scudder's case, and informing me that he and Jane had been to tea with the widow and her son, who had both endeavoured to testify by their kindness towards them the heartfelt gratitude they cherished in respect to myself. William added that Tom Scudder had purchased a boat, and had every prospect of doing well, as he was an object of universal sympathy in Deal. From Mrs. Kingston I likewise received a letter, informing me that Mrs. Maitland was exceedingly ill when communicated with at Brighton, and had left the entire supervision of Laura's circumstances in her (Mrs. Kingston's) hands. The letter went on to tell me that Laura had been placed in the establishment of an eminent physician in the neighbourhood of London, where every arrangement was made for her welfare. In respect to myself, Mrs. Kingston said that much as she and the Squire regretted having lost me from the Grange (whither they had only returned the night before this letter was written), yet they could not possibly feel angry or hurt—but on the contrary, experienced an increased admiration for my character.

And now the reader will doubtless be anxious to know how Edgar Selden had conducted himself towards me and Sarah during the fortnight which had thus elapsed since the date of my installation at Talbot Abbey. The truth is, we saw but little of him: for on the very day after my arrival, he went to Canterbury on a visit to the Colonel of the regiment stationed there, and with whom he was intimately acquainted. He remained ten days absent; and for the four or five days after his return, the weather was so rainy, that we had not been able to go out and take our walk with the children. I however met Mr. Selden two or three times upon the stairs—when he looked very hard at me, but said nothing. I kept a strict watch upon Sarah, without suffering her to perceive that I was doing so: but she no doubt comprehended that such was the case. After Mr. Selden's return from Canterbury, and during the rainy days which kept us indoors, I found her frequently inventing pretexts for going down stairs—to the library to borrow a book, or to the servants' hall to ask Fanny for something, or to the housekeeper for articles that she pretended to want—and so forth. But I generally managed to anticipate these excuses, and prevent her from running about the house. When she

wanted the book, I said that I also wished some volumes and would get her's at the same time: and in respect to going to the servants' hall or to the housekeeper's room, I said that as Fanny was specially appointed to wait upon the nursery, we would ring for her. On those occasions Sarah bit her lip, and her eyes flashed; but I affected to take no notice of this passing anger—and she made no farther manifestation of her feelings. I could not help thinking that she had reasoned herself into a belief that it was prudent to adopt a conciliatory policy towards me, and submit in all things with as good a grace as she could, so as to lull me into the idea that she had become completely tractable and docile,—hoping that I should thus relax in my vigilance over her, and furnish her with opportunities, which she evidently sought, of escaping from restraint and acting as her own mistress. The reader may rest assured that I should not record anything injurious to my own sister—or thus charge her with duplicity—without sufficient ground. But I must not anticipate events, nor forestall incidents; but allow my narrative to pursue its regular and consecutive course.

The rains passed away; and at the expiration of the fortnight the weather was once more beautifully serene and clear. Accordingly, we took advantage of the first fine day to proceed for a walk with the children. Sarah dressed herself, as usual, with the greatest care; and we issued forth. I walked in front with the two eldest children, Sarah following with the youngest. We threaded our way through the spacious grounds, and passed out into the road, along which we proceeded, not in the direction of Farmer Jackson's, but the exact reverse. Sarah was silent, and only answered in monosyllables to the remarks which I made. I was at no loss to comprehend what was passing in her mind: for several times when I looked back, I perceived that she was glancing round with a sort of restless anxiety. She doubtless expected that Edgar Selden would seek this opportunity of seeing her: and it was with pain that I saw her thoughts were thus rivetted upon that young gentleman. Oh! if he had proffered an honourable love, with the unquestionable intention of proving faithful to his vows—how rejoiced should I have been at the fine prospects which would thus be in store for my sister! But I knew full well that he was not an individual who for a single moment could be classed in the same honourable category with my own well-beloved Eustace Quentin; and therefore was I profoundly grieved at the infatuation which he had succeeded in exciting in the heart of Sarah.

We had advanced along the lane but little more than a quarter of a mile from the entrance to the grounds, when the din of a horse's trappings, coming from behind, reached our ears. Glancing back at Sarah, I saw that the colour had mounted to her cheeks, and that mingled joy and alarm were dancing in her eyes. Poor girl! heaven knows how sincerely I pitied her. But, Oh! if she had been of a different character—of a less haughty spirit—of a disposition less impatient of control—I might have reasoned with her, as I at first wished to do, and as I still hoped to have an opportunity of doing. But for the present that course was not the one which the temper of her mind permitted me to adopt. I was therefore compelled to allow matters to take

their course, and act according as circumstances should suggest.

In a few minutes Edgar Selden overtook us, and at once reined in his horse. The glance that I flung at Sarah, showed me the heightened animation of joy which was upon her cheeks; and in the significant look which Selden threw upon her, I beheld the confirmation, if any were wanting, of my suspicion of the intelligence that subsisted between them. As for my own looks, I studied to render them as coldly reserved and as pointedly deprecatory as possible.

"Well—taking advantage of the first fine day, I perceive?" remarked Edgar, not appearing to address either of us in particular. "And so you have entered my aunt's service—have you, Mary? I suppose you thought me very rude for speaking to you the other day: but I was struck by your likeness to your sister Sarah."

I said nothing; but by slackening my pace as much as possible, showed that I was waiting for him to pass on. He looked annoyed, and seemed uncertain how to act: but speedily resuming his self-possession, he said, "I suppose, Mary, you gave your sister a good lecturing for talking to me the other day? But you should recollect that strange things occur in this world; and there are persons who do not always follow the conventional rules of society. You see I am compelled to talk vaguely and ambiguously, for certain reasons:"—and he glanced significantly at the children;—"but of course you can understand my meaning. There are young gentlemen who when they take a fancy in a particular quarter, and admire what is so well worthy of admiration, make up their minds to set the opinions of the world at defiance, and conduct to the altar just whomsoever they please and whom they find necessary to their happiness. Now do you understand me?"—and having thrown a glance of intelligence at Sarah, he fixed his eyes upon me: for it was to me he had been specially addressing himself.

"I am no hypocrite, Mr. Selden," was my response, delivered firmly but respectfully; "and therefore I will at once state that I do understand you. I must however observe that although such cases as these to which you have alluded do occur now and then, yet they are rare; and any proposals offered in such a sense and under such circumstances must in the first instance be viewed with very great reserve, and even with mistrust. Besides, it sometimes happens that the age of both or one of the parties puts all consideration of the matter out of the question, at least for the present. And now, Mr. Selden, though I also have spoken guardedly, yet I hope plainly enough for you to comprehend me."

"Yes," exclaimed Sarah—and as I turned to regard her, I saw that she was perfectly crimson, and that her eyes were flashing fire,—“it is all very well for certain persons to give their opinion; but they must not assume to themselves the right of dictation to others."

"Now, Mr. Selden," I said, very firmly and very deliberately, "Laqy Talbot has invested me with full authority in respect to the treatment and management of her children, and I have made up my mind that when I and my sister are out walking with them, we will not converse with any body else. Do you wish me to speak more plainly, sir?"

"I shall reply by asking you a question," exclaimed Edgar, the colour mounting to his cheeks. "Do you know that I am Lady Talbot's nephew, and that these little girls are my cousins?"

"I am perfectly aware of it, sir; and when you wish to see your cousins, I will conduct them down to the drawing-room. But out of doors I am determined that they shall walk with us alone."

"Mary, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for talking in this manner to Mr. Selden," muttered Sarah in a low hoarse voice, as she approached close up to me and spoke over my shoulder.

At that instant I glanced up to see whether the young gentleman overheard what my sister said—and if so whether he was encouraging her thus to address me: but I caught him shaking his head in a deprecating manner to Sarah, as much as to warn her that she was acting with a petulant impolicy; and I was at once seized with the conviction that he purposed to have recourse to duplicity and deceit in order to throw me off my guard and induce me to relax in my vigilance over my sister.

"Well, I don't wish to interfere with Mary's arrangements," he said: "but if she would let me have an opportunity of explaining certain things, it would perhaps be better for all parties."

"There are no explanations which can possibly alter existing circumstances," was my response.

Edgar Selden was again thrown into an uncertainty how to act: and probably in a fit of spleen and spite, he abruptly galloped away. During the latter portion of the colloquy the three children had run a little way ahead, and were sporting about in the lane; so that when Mr. Selden sped off in the manner just described, Sarah and I remained alone together and beyond earshot of the little girls.

"You see what you have done!" exclaimed Sarah, with concentrated rage in her looks and accents: "you have offended him!"—and then the tears burst forth from her eyes: but she was weeping with passion, and not with any softer feelings.

"Believe me, my dearest sister," I said in the most endearing tones, "it cuts me to the very quick to be compelled to do anything to distress you. I would lay down my life to ensure your happiness. This appears to be the moment for full explanations between you and me: for it was an avowal of love accompanied by a promise of marriage, which Edgar Selden just now made in that ambiguous manner. But he does not love you with a pure affection, Sarah—and he dreams not of marriage."

"How dare you say that of an honourable young gentleman?" demanded my sister, suddenly wiping away her tears, so that her eyes flashed indignantly upon me.

"I am afraid that I shall give you offence by my answer to your question: but nevertheless that answer shall be returned. It is this, Sarah: that I am older than you by nearly four years—that I have seen more of the world than you have—that unfortunately I have had opportunities of beholding its hypocrisies, its duplicities, and its deceptions—and that thence am I enabled to form a better opinion than you can of the real character of Mr. Selden. Now, do not speak angrily, Sarah. It will do no good. Let us talk the matter over quietly: for it is serious. I was not prepared to hear Mr. Selden express himself in such positive terms with regard



to you, disguised though his language was for the purpose of preventing the children from comprehending it. In this there was no harm: but it is his sincerity towards yourself that I question. Tell me, Sarah, do you love him—love him very much?"

"Yes—I do, I do," she answered vehemently; "and it is cruel of you, Mary, to act as you have done."

"No—not cruel, my dear Sarah—but prudent:" then after a few moments' reflection, I said, "I have a proposition to make; and if you accept it, it will be a complete test of the sincerity of Mr. Selden's affection, as well as of his honourable intentions."

"What is it?" exclaimed Sarah with the haste of suspense.

"I will, if you choose, seek an opportunity of conversing seriously with Mr. Selden. I will repeat in a direct manner what I said just now ambiguously

—that you are too young to think of marriage at present—almost too young to form any engagement at all: but I will propose to him that if his intentions be really honourable and sincere towards you, he will at once take his leave of Talbot Abbey, and that for two years to come he will not return; but if at the expiration of that interval he shall still entertain similar feelings towards you, there need of course be no farther barrier to your union. This delay will serve another purpose: it will not merely put the sincerity of his affection and his promises to the test, but will likewise enable us to judge of the steadiness of his character—whether he be a dissipated, pleasure-seeking young gentleman, running through his property—or whether he be a steady, well-conducted person, whom you could be proud and happy to call a husband. Now, Sarah, does this proposal of mine meet your views? or does it not?"

To my surprise and satisfaction, Sarah had listened to me with the deepest attention, not once interrupting me; and when I had done speaking, she reflected for some time ere she answered. At length she said, as if abruptly resolving what answer to give, "No, Mary, I will not risk the loss of such a fine marriage in this way. Out of sight out of mind, recollect! Besides—"

Here she stopped short; and I threw an inquiring look upon her: then, as an idea struck me, I said "Perhaps, Sarah, things have already gone farther between you and Mr. Selden than I had anticipated? perhaps you have already made him promises and pledges, to the speedy performance of which he is looking? Now, I conjure you, to tell me the whole truth. You must see that I am not your enemy in the matter; but am endeavouring to give you the best advice and to induce you to follow the most prudent course."

Still Sarah remained silent—not exactly shutting herself up in a haughty reserve, for she seemed somewhat moved by what I had said; but because she appeared to be deliberating whether she should make me her confidant entirely.

"Believe me, my dear girl," I said, "nothing would give me more unfeigned, more heartfelt satisfaction, than to see you make what is called a good match; and therefore I should be the last to throw an obstacle in the way of such an alliance."

"And what if I told you that Edgar has already offered to marry me at once, and make a lady of me?" exclaimed Sarah. "Yes, this is the truth. What he said just now, was intended for your ears, more than for mine. He has told me that he loves me—he has assured me that I am necessary to his happiness—he is rich and independent—he cares nothing about the opinion of the world—only of course he would not wish his aunt and Sir Richard to know anything of his intentions until after our marriage."

"What then has he proposed?" I inquired. "Has he solicited you to fly away with him?"

Again my sister remained silent—and again she appeared to be buried in her reflections. At length she slowly raised her head, saying, "I am sure, Mary, that Mr. Selden would not object for you to come with us; and then you could be satisfied of his sincerity and honourable intentions."

"I therefore perceive, Sarah, that he *has* spoken seriously to you of flight, and that you have listened to him. Ah! perhaps you are little aware of the peril you have escaped! Oh! my dear sister, I do beseech you to arouse yourself from this delusive dream! What—can you believe it possible that after the brief acquaintance of a few weeks, this young gentleman can be so infatuated with you that he is willing, all in a moment, to fly in the face of the world, his relatives and friends, and make you his wife? No, Sarah—you must not put faith in such offers!"

"There is enough of it, then," ejaculated my sister. "I am sorry I have told you so much: but I thought for a moment you were inclined to act in a friendly way towards me."

"And so I am, dear Sarah—and it is in this sense that I am counselling you. Let me make to Mr. Selden the proposition I have suggested."

"And then he will be completely offended, and I

shall lose him altogether:"—and again did the tears start from my sister's eyes. "You are very cruel, Mary,—very harsh and very severe."

"You know well enough that this is not my character. But if your affections be indeed deeply engaged, I will not upbraid you for these reproaches addressed to myself. Sarah, you are not deficient in intelligence: reflect—consider! If Mr. Selden be sincerely, devotedly, and honourably attached to you, he will wait two years, and will subscribe with joy to the conditions I propose to lay down on your behalf."

Again Sarah reflected; and at length she said, with some degree of eagerness, "Well then, Mary, be it as you say. I leave it in your hands. But pray lose no time in speaking to him."

"The opportunity at once presents itself—or I am very much mistaken," I said. "Hark!"

"Yes—it is he!" ejaculated Sarah, as the sounds of an approaching steed reached our ears.

"Do you take charge of the children," said I quickly; "and I will speak to Mr. Selden, provided he himself furnishes me with the opportunity."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the object of our discourse came in sight, retracing his way along the lane. Sarah hurried forward to the children, who were some yards in advance; and I lingered where I was. Edgar stopped and said something to Sarah, but what I could not hear, as she was already too far off. She gave him some answer, which seemed to me a little longer than it need be, if it were merely to tell him that I wished to speak with him: and then she glanced towards the spot where I was standing. Mr. Selden accordingly rode up to me, and in a very civil and courteous manner, said, "Sarah tells me, Mary, that you have something to say."

"I wish to have a few minutes' serious conversation with you, Mr. Selden, if you will permit it."

"Most undoubtedly—with the utmost pleasure in the world!"—and he sprang from his horse.

"Am I to understand, Mr. Selden, that you have avowed an attachment to my sister, and that you have offered to make her your wife?"

"As plainly as I dared speak just now," was the young gentleman's response, "did I give you to understand that such was the case?"

"But you must remember, Mr. Selden," I said, looking as hard at him as I dared, "that you have known my sister but for a very short time."

"Long enough to love her," he answered, and with a seriousness too that I could scarcely think feigned, while he steadily met my searching gaze.

"Granting that you do love her thus, Mr. Selden," I resumed, "may it not be a fleeting passion—a temporary infatuation? Pardon me for speaking thus frankly and boldly: but you must remember that she is an orphan—and that I, as her elder sister, am bound to look anxiously and closely after her welfare."

"I am young, Mary Price, but I am no fool," returned Edgar Selden. "I have seen a little of life, and can judge pretty well of my own inclinations. I tell you—and I say it most solemnly and seriously—that I love your sister as much as man can love, and that I shall never change my mind. Will this assurance suffice?"

"I am bound to believe you, Mr. Selden," I answered: "that is to say, I am bound to believe

that you yourself interpret your own thoughts and feelings in this manner. But remember that Sarah is so very young—she is but a few months past sixteen, although she looks two or three years older: she has no experience of the world—she is not yet adapted to fulfil the duties of a wife. You yourself are also very young. Would it not be prudent for you to wait a-while?"

"Well, Mary, since you have taken up the matter in a strain I so little expected after your cold and reserved conduct towards me just now, I am bound to follow your advice. You are Sarah's eldest sister, and have a right to counsel her. What is it that you suggest? what conditions do you seek to impose? Do not let them be too hard, and I will study to obey them."

"I am truly sorry, Mr. Selden," was my rejoinder, "that I should stand in the position of one appearing to dictate to a near relation of the lady in whose service both myself and sister are engaged: but it is under peculiar circumstances that I am performing this part. I mean to speak very frankly and candidly to you. You must admit that as yet Sarah and I know but very little of you; and however humble my sister may be, she has as much right to consult her own happiness in the serious circumstance of marriage as if she were the highest and most independent lady in the land. Now, you may conscientiously believe that your affection is sincere and permanent, as you may likewise have the conviction that your intentions are honourable. But what guarantee have we of that sincerity of affection? If Sarah were on an equal footing with yourself, it would be different; because she would feel that she was in every way worthy of the affection avowed—whereas, according to the opinion of the world, she is in a position beneath you; and should your affection be transient after all, she would have the mortification to find you were ashamed of your wife. Now, Mr. Selden, on my sister's part, I ask a guarantee and a proof of that affection with which you appear to honour her. I would stipulate that you lose no time in leaving Talbot Abbey, and that for a considerable interval—eighteen months or two years—you put your own affection to the test by continued absence from its object. But let it be sincerely hoped that you will not trifle with my poor sister. If at the expiration of three months, or six months, or a year—as the case may be—you find that what I apprehend has proved correct, and that your feeling toward Sarah was transient,—or if circumstances should point out for you a more eligible match,—then do not—Oh, do not, I conjure you, delay in frankly and candidly writing to avow the truth. It may cause her pain: but such fair and open dealing may save her much more. And now, Mr. Selden, do you consent to my proposal?"

He had listened to me in silence and apparently with profound attention: he now seemed to reflect as deeply.

"Your conditions are hard, Mary," he at length said,—“very hard; and yet I can scarcely blame you. Not for a moment have I any doubt as to the strength of my own attachment: but the idea of this separation is very painful. I know not how I can consent. It must only be upon two conditions—”

"Name them," said I.

"The first is that you permit me an opportunity for one last interview with your sister: and the other is that you let me write to her."

"To both do I consent, but with counter-conditions," I answered. "In the first place, you shall have an opportunity of speaking to Sarah for a few minutes; but it must be in my presence. In the second place, you may write to her occasionally; but under cover to myself."

"You treat me with suspicion and mistrust," ejaculated the young gentleman. "Nevertheless, I suppose I must comply with your stipulations: and surely this will convince you of my honour and sincerity?"

"It certainly goes far," I said, "to give me a better opinion of you than I had at first formed."

"And wherefore should you have entertained an evil opinion of me?"

"I will tell you very candidly. There was something in your manner and speech towards me when first we met, that I did not like. How was it, Mr. Selden, that while so devoted to my sister, you thought fit to pay me compliments? Think you not that there was something, to say the least, bordering on levity and impropriety therein?—and can you wonder if with the impression of your remarks upon my mind, I should have been—"

"So careful of Sarah? I knew what you were going to say. But you have not told her what I said upon the occasion?" he demanded.

"Certainly not. I would not wound her feelings unnecessarily. Besides, in the same spirit of candour in which I have all along been speaking, I will tell you very frankly that I regarded your observation merely as the half-thoughtless, half-impudent remarks which young gentlemen too often consider themselves privileged to make to young females of an inferior grade."

"You are uncommonly hard upon me, Mary. I did not know at the time that you were so very particular and precise. It is true that I had heard you admirably spoken of by my aunt, who one day, when in a humour to talk—which she very seldom is—told me a great deal about you. However, I hope you will forgive what I said to you the other morning?"

"We will speak of it no more. And now, Mr. Selden, when will you leave Talbot Abbey?"

"I must ferret out some excuse," he answered.

"I will write to London, and get a friend of mine to send me a very pressing letter to come up without delay—"

"I do not ask you how you will manage the transaction," I interrupted him; "because I would rather not know. Will you undertake to leave in three or four days?"

"I will—positively."

"Then, when you are in readiness for departure, you can easily come up to the nursery to bid your cousins farewell; and at the same time you may have an opportunity of saying a few words to Sarah."

"I suppose I must yield to you in all things. And now, Mary, you have nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing, Mr. Selden—except to thank you for your compliance with all the conditions I have laid down."

"They shall be fulfilled to the letter:"—and

springing on his steed, he looked back, waved his hand to Sarah, and galloped towards the Abbey.

Meanwhile my sister had loitered with the children about fifty yards behind us. I now stopped short; and she hastened to overtake me. In a few hurried words I gave her to understand that my conditions were complied with—that Mr. Selden would leave in a few days—that he was to have an opportunity of bidding her farewell ere his departure—and that during the period of their separation he was to write to her occasionally, but under cover to myself. Sarah thanked me—but, it struck me, with a forced effusion of gratitude: and I resolved not to relax my vigilance over her until Edgar should have left the Abbey. For the reader must not suppose that I was altogether satisfied with his sincerity, either in respect to his intentions of marriage or to his promise that he would remain for so long an interval away from Sarah. My grand object however was to get them separated; and this aim once accomplished, it would be time enough to think of the best means of weaning her from the attachment she had formed and the lofty hopes she had entertained.

The next three days passed without any incident worthy of mention. Sarah devised no pretext for quitting the nursery; and when we walked out with the children, Mr. Selden did not again join us. On the fourth morning—soon after breakfast, when Fanny came up to take away the things—she said, “Mr. Selden is going to leave us to-day; and we are all so sorry down stairs—for the house will become quite dull again.”

I watched the servant-maid attentively, as she thus spoke, to see if she looked at all significantly at Sarah: for I had all along been anxious to ascertain whether my sister's love-affair had been suspected, or had come to the knowledge of the servants of the household. But there was nothing in Fanny's manner to indicate that she was at all aware of Mr. Selden's attentions to Sarah. As for Sarah herself, she betrayed no particular feeling on receiving this announcement of the young gentleman's contemplated departure, as she had of course been well prepared to expect it. About an hour afterwards Fanny re-appeared, with the intimation that as Mr. Selden was about to leave the Abbey—the carriage being in readiness to take him across to Canterbury—he wished to know whether it was convenient for him to come up at once and bid his cousins good bye? I answered in the affirmative—Fanny retired—and in a few minutes Edgar entered the room.

“I am going,” he said with a significant look at me—as much as to bid me observe how faithfully he kept his promise.

“I have understood so,” was my response; and as I had beforehand purposely set the children to play in the adjacent chamber, I now entered it myself, but leaving the door of communication wide open, so as to hear and observe what passed.

“I am about to depart, dear Sarah,” said Mr. Selden, fixing his eyes tenderly upon my sister; “and you will think of me? Mary will permit you to answer my letters. I shall not make you any more pledges or promises, because the course I am now pursuing is the best proof of my attachment.”

“I am sure that Mary will not object to me writing to you,” responded Sarah in tremulous

tones. “You ask me to think of you? You know that I shall—always, always!”

“And you will not be unhappy during our separation?” observed Edgar, with a great deal of tenderness in his tone.

“I shall endeavour to make myself happy, in the hope that you are thinking of me and loving me as much as ever.”

“Be assured I shall. It will be impossible for me to be otherwise! You are everything that is most dear to me. Remember, dearest Sarah, that you are the object of my only hope: all my happiness is centred in you!”

“And are you not the same to me?” murmured my sister, but still audibly enough to reach my ears.

“Farewell then, dear girl—farewell!” and Edgar glancing into the inner room to assure himself that the children did not observe him at the moment, carried my sister's hands to his lips.

“Farewell, farewell!” she replied, and then turned abruptly away to the window to conceal her tears from the little ones.

I now brought the children forth into the sitting-room; and there Edgar took leave of them.

“Good bye, Mary,” he said, offering me his hand, which I of course could not refuse to take: and the next moment, with one parting glance flung towards Sarah, he hastily quitted the room.

About a quarter of an hour afterwards we beheld Sir Richard Talbot's travelling-chariot rolling along the gravel road which intersected the park; and Sarah stood at the window watching till it was out of sight.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE ACCIDENT.

THREE or four days after Edgar Selden's departure, I received a letter bearing the London post-mark; and on opening it found that the envelope contained an enclosure addressed to my sister. This letter, being unsealed, was thus left at my disposal to read it if I chose; and I therefore at once concluded there could be nothing in it which the writer would wish to escape my knowledge. Not choosing to wound Sarah's feelings by reading the document first, I immediately handed it to her. She read it with brightening joy upon her countenance; and when she had perused its contents, she tendered it to me. I did not then hesitate to read the communication, and found it to be a very proper and nicely written letter from Edgar Selden, announcing his arrival at his lodgings in Conduit Street, Hanover Square, London—and breathing the most affectionate assurances of constant love and devotion towards my sister. I was considerably pleased with that letter; and I began to think that, perhaps after all, I might have judged the young gentleman somewhat too severely, and that at the bottom of all his levity and flippancy there might be a really good heart, which though somewhat warped by the pursuits of fashionable life, could yet be easily reclaimed by the influence of a pure and sincere love. Such was my hope: but it was no sanguine belief that I entertained. I had seen too much of the world to arrive at hasty conclusions;

—and particularly in this case, where my sister's happiness was so vitally concerned, I resolved to form no precipitate opinion. Sarah watched my countenance as I read the letter; and when I had finished the perusal, I said I was pleased that Mr. Selden had written in such a strain.

"I suppose you will have no objection to me answering it?" observed Sarah.

"Not the slightest," was my immediate reponse.

She accordingly sat down and penned a letter, which she showed to me when it was finished. I was well pleased with that likewise; and having seen her fold it up, seal, and address it (under cover to one of Mr. Selden's London tradesmen, so as to prevent the direction being observed by any of the domestics at the Abbey) it was given to Fanny to be put into the letter-bag in readiness for the carrier's van when it passed.

The reader may perhaps be surprised that I should thus countenance a clandestine correspondence between my sister and my mistress's nephew: but I could not possibly help myself. It was an act indeed, which I much disliked; but it was a far less evil than would otherwise have happened if I had prevented it altogether. For let the reader comprehend well the difficult circumstances in which I found myself placed. Had I acted with too great severity towards Sarah—had I used the utmost coercion, inexorably forbidding the slightest communication between herself and her admirer—would not her proud spirit have rebelled? and would she not have fled—at any risks, and reckless perhaps of any results—to join him? Then, if once she had taken this step, would she not have been lost? It may be argued that I might have told Lady Talbot everything: but would this have prevented Sarah from becoming Edgar's victim? On the contrary, it would have led to that catastrophe. She would have been discharged from her situation; and indignant with me as the cause of it, would have at once flown to her lover. Therefore, all things considered, I could satisfy my own conscience that I was acting the most prudential part, not merely with regard to my own sister's safety and honour, but likewise in respect to Edgar Selden himself. For if he really entertained no permanent affection for Sarah, it would not be the occasional exchange of letters that would ensure it. On the other hand, if in the long run he did espouse my sister, it would not be that he was inveigled into the alliance, but that it was contracted on account of an enduring love on his part; and such a worthy attachment was assuredly one deserving to be crowned with happiness?

A few days after the receipt of Edgar's letter and the transmission of Sarah's response, the whole household at Talbot Abbey was suddenly thrown into a state of excitement by the announcement that the family was to remove to the sea-side for the summer months. Lady Talbot had within the last fortnight become more indisposed than ever—indeed to a degree that had begun to alarm her husband. Not contented with the treatment of the Ashford doctor who had been drenching her with medicine for years, Sir Richard—arousing himself from the kind of physical torpor in which he spent his life in his library, surrounded by his books—had suddenly taken a resolute step. He sent to Canterbury for a couple of physicians to come over to the Abbey and hold a consultation.

The result thereof was that there was nothing serious to apprehend in respect to her ladyship's health—that she required exercise and a general arousing of the energies—that she was not sinking beneath any insidious disease, but was yielding to nervousness, languor, and despondency, and was thus suffering herself as it were to fade gradually out of existence instead of making the proper efforts to cling to life. The doctors recommended change of air and a residence at the sea-side. A watering-place with a genial salubrious atmosphere was to be selected; and as her ladyship disliked society and could not endure the bustle of a large town, Herne Bay was fixed upon as the temporary residence of the family during the summer months. This place—which is little more than a straggling village—is situated along the shore of a large bay, formed by the sea at the mouth of the Thames between the Isle of Sheppey and Margate. Eight miles distant from Canterbury, it was altogether twenty-eight from Talbot Abbey; and this was a journey that could easily be accomplished in a day.

By one of those caprices which ladies often entertain when in the morbid condition of half-hypochondriacism and half-indisposition, Lady Talbot was much pleased with the proposed trip; and she seemed inclined to exert herself to the utmost of her power in giving the requisite instructions for the journey, especially with regard to those of the household who were to accompany the family. It was arranged that the children should go in charge of myself and Sarah, attended by Fanny: one footman, Sir Richard's valet, a lady's-maid, two housemaids, also the cook, together with the coachmen and grooms, were to complete the number. The barouche and the travelling-carriage were to take us with Sir Richard's own horses to Ashford; and thence we were to proceed with post-horses to Herne Bay, the former animals to follow with the grooms at leisure. But in the meanwhile Sir Richard's steward went over to Herne Bay to hire a furnished house for the accommodation of the family; and in order that everything might be as comfortable as possible, a quantity of extra furniture, plate, linen, and wine, was sent over a few days before we started.

It was in the middle of the month of May, the weather being serenely beautiful, that at nine o'clock one morning the equipages set out from Talbot Abbey. They were ordered to proceed at a very leisurely pace, as her ladyship could not endure the jolting of the vehicle in which she sat; and she was moreover so nervous as to be always afraid of accidents. Sir Richard and herself occupied the interior of one of the carriages: the three children with Sarah and myself were seated in the other,—and as many of the servants as could be accommodated, filled the box and rumble of each. The grooms had gone on to Ashford beforehand, to be in readiness to take charge of the horses. That town was passed—and it was about noon when we reached Canterbury, where, as Lady Talbot already began to complain of fatigue, it was resolved to wait a couple of hours in order that we might take refreshments and she might have leisure to repose herself. Again for a short time did I thus find myself at the *Fountain Hotel*; and I could not help thinking of Mr. and Mrs. Twisden, in whose

service I was on the first occasion I ever set foot in that establishment. Shortly after two o'clock we entered the carriages again; and passing out of Canterbury, were about three miles on the Herne Bay road—just a little beyond the picturesque village of Sturry—when one of the post-horses attached to the front equipage (the one in which Sir Richard and Lady Talbot were seated) took fright at some object and became unmanageable. It was not the horse on which the postilion was seated—or else perhaps his life would have been lost: for the animal kicked and plunged in a fearful manner, and frightening the other horse, they both galloped away at a tremendous rate, the postilion being utterly unable to stop them. The carriage was dragged partially up a bank by the side of the road, and it suddenly upset with a terrific crash.

The cries of alarm raised by the servants seated outside the carriage in which I was with my sister and the children, first made us aware that something was wrong; and looking out of the window, I beheld the equipage in front dashing along at a furious rate. The next moment it was whirled round a turning in the road and lost to my view: then the crash was heard—and in another minute our vehicle reached the spot where the accident had happened. All was confusion and dismay; but fortunately none of the poor servants (all males) who were seated outside the overturned vehicle, were injured beyond the receipt of a few bruises. How they escaped so well was perfectly miraculous; nevertheless, they did thus escape—and that was the essential. But, as a matter of course, they, as well as the rest of the party, were excessively frightened. The children cried bitterly; and I, thrusting out my hand, opened one of the doors of our carriage and alighted. Lady Talbot was senseless—and Sir Richard was also nearly stunned by the violence of the concussion: but he speedily recovered himself, and though much bruised and hurt, helped to render assistance in recovering his wife. It was a strange and exciting scene, and a painful one too, altogether. The poor lady, having been drawn as gently as possible out of the vehicle, was deposited upon some cloaks spread upon the bank, while myself and the lady's-maid administered such restoratives as were at hand—namely, the bottle of smelling salts and another of volatile essence which her ladyship had with her.

While we were thus engaged, an elderly, sedate-looking man, dressed in black, with a white neck-cloth, rode up to the spot on a short, compact, strongly-built horse, which my experience in these matters, gleaned at Kingston Grange, enables me to describe as a very handsome cob. This individual, who was about fifty-five years of age, had not exactly the appearance of a clergyman, although his dress was clerical: but he seemed a head servant, steward, or butler, in a wealthy family. Immediately upon coming up to the spot where the accident had occurred,—and seeing that her ladyship was in a very precarious condition, as our endeavours to restore her had for five minutes proved utterly vain,—he at once made a kind and hospitable proposal to Sir Richard Talbot.

"I am steward, sir," he said, "to a gentleman whose mansion is at no great distance—indeed barely a quarter of a mile behind this grove which veils it from your view. My master is not at home

at present: but if he were, I am sure he would approve of the invitation which I give you to transport this lady thither at once. And I beg, sir—as I observe that you have children with you, that you will not hesitate to bring them and all your servants, if you think fit. Take the first turning to the left, the house will be before your eyes—and on reaching it, use my name. Say Mr. Tufnell directed you thither. I will gallop back into Sturry, where there is a surgeon, and bring him up at once. Perhaps I shall be at the Hall almost as soon as yourselves."

Having thus spoken, in a hurried manner, but with much kindness and benevolence, Mr. Tufnell turned his horse's head and galloped back towards Sturry,—shooting down a steep hill in a manner that proved his confidence in the sure-footed qualities of his little cob.

Lady Talbot began to open her eyes, but in a languid manner, which heaven knows had no affectation in it now: for she had received a very severe shock. Her breath came with difficult gaspings; and for a few minutes we were all stricken with the dire apprehension lest each one should be her last. Fortunately however our fears were not realized; and her ladyship recovered sufficiently for us to place her in the uninjured carriage. Sir Richard did not choose to avail himself to the very letter of the hospitable invitation received from Tufnell, by taking the whole party along with him: he accordingly decided that myself and Sarah, with the children, the lady's-maid, and the valet, should go to the mansion in company with himself and her ladyship, but that the rest of the servants should either make the upset carriage available to take them on to Herne Bay, or else get thither on foot, as it was but five miles distant.

It being but a quarter of a mile to the mansion which was our present destination, I and Sarah, with the children, followed the carriage on foot; and as it proceeded very slowly—indeed at a walk, for Lady Talbot was now less able than ever to endure the jolting—we reached the Hall almost as soon as the equipage itself. It was not a very large structure, nor yet a very modern one—but handsome, and beautifully situated in the midst of a small park. The moment Mr. Tufnell's name was used at the entrance-lodge, the iron gates flew open; and the porter, on learning the accident that had occurred, hastened to fetch a glass of water, which her ladyship much needed. The beverage revived her considerably; and the vehicle passed on up to the entrance of the Hall. In the excitement of his feelings Sir Richard no doubt forgot to ask the porter to whom the mansion and park belonged; and of course no one else took the liberty of making the inquiry.

When we reached the house, the servants belonging to it showed the utmost alacrity in rendering all possible assistance and proffering the most hospitable attentions. Her ladyship was at once conveyed to a bed-chamber—while Sarah, myself, and the children were conducted into a handsomely furnished sitting-room. Soon afterwards we beheld Mr. Tufnell, accompanied by a gentleman also on horseback, galloping up the avenue towards the mansion; and we therefore concluded that this was the village-doctor whom he had found at home and so expeditiously brought along with him. In a few minutes

the female-servant came to tell us that her ladyship was in no danger; and that beyond some severe contusions and the violent shock sustained from the accident, she had received no injury calculated to inspire apprehension. The village-surgeon, however, had recommended that she should be kept quiet until the morrow, or perhaps the day after; and it further appeared that the housekeeper was doing every thing she could to make the visitors comfortable.

"This is the room which you can consider your own while you are here," continued the servant. "There is a large bed-chamber, with a smaller one adjoining, exactly overhead; so that you cannot mistake your way when you choose to retire thither. The door facing this apartment, upon the landing, opens into the picture-gallery, which contains several works of art worth seeing; and you are very welcome to go and amuse yourselves there. The gardens at the back of the house you will find beautifully laid out; and perhaps the young ladies"—alluding to the little girls—"may like to run about there presently. You have only to ring one of the bells to have anything you wish. Refreshments will be brought up to you very shortly."

I thanked the servant-maid for her kindness and urbanity; and by the time we had rested ourselves a little, the door again opened and two livery-servants made their appearance to spread the table for dinner. A very nice repast was then served up; and when it was over, I proposed to Sarah to avail ourselves of the permission afforded to inspect the picture-gallery. The children however besought me to let them go down into the garden. I accordingly bade my sister conduct them thither, while I visited the gallery: for now that I knew Edgar Selden was far away, I had no fear in trusting Sarah out of my sight. She and the children accordingly descended to the grounds in the rear of the edifice, while I passed into the picture-gallery.

This I found to be long and lofty, with an oaken floor, and an arched roof of the same wood, groined and sculptured. The gallery was lighted from the roof, and thus the pictures were displayed in all their finest effects. Along one side there was a miscellaneous collection—landscapes, sea-pieces, battle-scenes, animals, buildings, and so forth, all by good artists, and some of a very large size. On the other side of the gallery there was an array of portraits, male and female, with a certain family likeness prevailing throughout the male characters. Commencing at one extremity, and surveying the portraits in succession, while passing along to the other end, it was curious to observe the different costumes graduating from Henry the Eighth's time, through the several intervening reigns, down to the present time; and I naturally concluded that these portraits represented the ancestors and ancestresses of the present proprietors of the mansion. There were no names upon the picture-frames to indicate whom the portraits did represent; and as I observed this, I was struck by the singularity of the fact that I had now been two hours within those walls, receiving the kindest hospitality, and yet still utterly unacquainted with the name of the owner of the place.

I resolved to inspect the portraits first, before devoting my attention to the miscellaneous pictures on the opposite side. Gradually as I passed along

the gallery, looking at portrait after portrait—there being about thirty in all—the idea imperceptibly stole into my brain that there was something in the countenances of the males not altogether unfamiliar to me; and the farther I proceeded, the stronger grew this impression. At length I reached the last portrait; and it was with something like a start and a feeling so vaguely singular that I cannot describe it, that my eyes became rivetted upon the features which appeared to look out at me from the very canvass itself. Yes—most assuredly I had seen that face before! It was the countenance of a gentleman in the prime of life—remarkably handsome—with dark eyes and hair; and though with a somewhat haughty curl of the upper lip, yet the general impression made upon the beholder was that of a man in whose looks there was a blending of melancholy, generosity, and kindness. I stood gazing upon that portrait with a species of fascination: there was a vague and mysterious sensation creeping over me—a presentiment of something that I could not fathom, stealing into my mind—a growing idea that in some way or another, for which I could not immediately account, I was in reality more interested in the original of that portrait than I had reason to suspect. Thus did I gaze on. Thoughts and recollections of the past were agitating in my brain; and as a sudden light flashed in as it were upon those struggling reminiscences to illumine them somewhat, it was with an ejaculation from my lips and a spasmodic start like a quick tremor, that I recognized the portrait!

The reader cannot have forgotten that in the very first chapter of my narrative I recorded how when I was only eleven years old—dwelling with my parents, my brothers, and sisters, in our little cottage at Ashford—my mother was suddenly disturbed and agitated by beholding the countenance of a gentleman looking in at the window. I had caught a glimpse of that countenance just as it was being withdrawn: it was but a very partial glimpse of the vanishing face, and therefore so abrupt was its disappearance that the countenance of that gentleman had made but a slight impression upon my recollection at the time. But now my memory appeared to reveal as it were that impression in stronger colours than I had fancied it had retained; and in the portrait before me I could no longer doubt that I beheld the face of which I had caught a glimpse with a vanishing Rembrandt-like effect as it disappeared from the window on the occasion referred to.

The conviction that this was the case well nigh overpowered me—not so much by the circumstance of the sudden discovery of the identity of that countenance with the portrait in this gallery, as on account of the many cruel and painful associations the incident conjured up. The tragic events connected with the death of my mother and the disappearance of my father, started up again with all their pristine vividness before me. The anxiety of my mother to conceal from the knowledge of my father the appearance of that countenance at the window—the way she had enjoined Robert and myself to keep the matter secret—then the lapse of four years and upwards, at the expiration of which the letter with the black seal was brought to the cottage by Mad Tommy, who said he had been charged by a gentleman to deliver it to my mother

—the alteration which took place between that dear mother and Robert, which led to her death—the reading of that letter by my father—the horror and the consternation which he experienced on perusing it—the frantic manner in which he had rushed forth from the house—and then the terrible tidings which Mad Tommy had subsequently brought, leading us to believe that our father had committed suicide,—all these incidents flamed up as it were before me in rapid and terrible succession. What was my mother's secret? Was not the letter—that fatal letter with the black seal—in my possession? could I not read it if I chose? and might it not afford me a clue to the development of the entire mystery? Ah, yes: but hitherto I had faithfully and religiously abstained from penetrating that secret. I had respected it as inviolably as I revered my mother's memory profoundly; and even when at times the mystery had intruded upon my thoughts, I had invariably done my best to banish it again, for fear lest my curiosity should grow stronger than my sense of duty to the memory of a beloved and departed parent. Besides, had not Mr. Collins himself—one of the best and dearest friends my family ever possessed—had *he* not, even on his death-bed, penned a memorandum counselling me not to read that letter for the present? and was not his advice in unison with the dictates of my own heart?

Such were my reflections as I still stood gazing upon the portrait before me; and I inwardly resolved to suffer no feeling of curiosity which the coincidence had excited in my mind, to lead me to disregard Mr. Collins's advice—unless indeed any fresh circumstances should transpire to render it a matter of necessity, and not of choice, to make myself acquainted with the contents of that letter.

I must now observe that the portrait which stood next to the one that had rivetted my attention, was that of a lady apparently about fifty years of age, and whose countenance was of a very singular expression. That the original of this portrait must in her youth have been exceedingly beautiful, was patent enough: the artist had preserved the traces of that beauty in a manner to convince the beholder that they must have been even still more evident in the animated countenance of the original itself. But that beauty was of a wild and almost fearful character, and I did not like to dwell upon it. My looks, therefore, speedily reverted to the one which had produced so powerful an impression upon me; and again did I fall into a deep reverie, reviewing all the incidents of the past. So profound was my abstraction that I did not catch the approaching steps of an individual, who, having entered the gallery, was now close to the spot where I stood; and I started as one does from a sleep, when I suddenly heard a voice speaking near me.

"You appear to regard that portrait with great attention?" said Mr. Tufnell: for he it was who now stood close by my elbow.

"Yes—I have been looking at it—it interested me," I stammered out, with some degree of confusion.

"That is the likeness of my late master," observed Mr. Tufnell, with a mournful look and a profound sigh.

"Who was he?" I inquired, anxious to know his name.

"Sir Wyndham Clavering," was the response.

"Sir Wyndham Clavering!" I ejaculated in astonishment. "Then who is your present master? to whom does this mansion belong?"

"What! do you not know?" cried Mr. Tufnell. "Are you actually all this time unaware in whose house you are?"

"Indeed," I responded, scarcely able to subdue my excitement, "I had not the curiosity to ask. Who is he?"

"Sir Aubrey Clavering," was the reply.

CHAPTER CIV.

THE GIPSY QUEEN'S LOVE.

I was prepared for this answer from the moment that the steward had mentioned the name of his late master: but still I could not help feeling greatly excited. The idea that I, of all persons in the world, who had been the object of so much persecution on the part of Sir Aubrey Clavering, and at one time in Derbyshire had suffered so much through him,—the idea, I repeat, that I should now find myself an inmate of his mansion—virtually receiving his hospitality, though he himself was absent at the time—was sufficient thus to agitate and startle me. There was something strange—almost alarming in the coincidence. And then did the question rush to my thoughts—what could my mother have had to do with the late Sir Wyndham Clavering? Oh! I was seized with a strong shuddering, as again all the incidents of bygone years swept like a horrible phantasmagorian train through my mind. Was it indeed possible that my mother's secret involved a tale of guilt? Oh! it was horrible—it was dreadful, thus to have one's respect, and confidence, and loving trust in a departed mother shaken and unsettled;—and looking down into the secret depths of my own soul, I could not help reading aright the feeling which, although I had never dared admit its precise nature unto myself, had contributed so strongly to induce me to avoid every attempt to penetrate the mystery of my mother's secret. It was, in truth—and I could no longer conceal it from myself—a feeling of apprehension lest in fathoming her secret I should discover something that would lessen her in my estimation.

"You are excited—you are affected? Something strange is passing in your mind?"—and as Mr. Tufnell thus spoke, he gazed upon me, with mingled curiosity, benevolence, and compassionate interest in his looks.

I made no answer: I knew not what to say: my mind was distressed—my thoughts were growing confused—and I must have gazed upon the worthy, kind-hearted man with a species of bewilderment.

"Do tell me what has thus strangely affected you?" he said, taking my hand, and looking still more benevolently and compassionately upon me. "How is it that the name of Clavering should have produced such an influence upon you? But tell me who you are: to whom have I the pleasure of speaking?"

"My name is Price—Mary Price," I answered.

"Ah!" he quickly ejaculated. "Then indeed it is no wonder that the name of Sir Aubrey Claver-



ing should have thus affected you: for I am well aware how you suffered at his hands. And you are Mary Price—the noble-hearted girl whose conduct in Derbyshire so much excited my admiration at the time? It is indeed a strange coincidence that has brought you hither. But you need fear nothing: my master is in London—and I believe there is no chance of his return at present.”

“At least,” I replied with a look that thanked him for the kind manner in which he spoke to me, “I should feel myself secure under your protection.”

“Yes indeed,” responded Mr. Tufnell, with a sigh: “you must not judge of the servants by their master. Very different from the present baronet was the late one!”—and he turned his eyes towards the portrait of Sir Wyndham Clavering. “That lady whose portrait you see next,” he continued, “was Sir Wyndham’s mother. Ah! there was some strange mystery in connexion with her!”—and as he thus spoke rather in a musing manner than

actually addressing himself to me, his countenance became sombre and ominous.

“I have heard,” said I, “that Sir Wyndham Clavering met his death in some shocking manner.”

“It was indeed so,” responded Tufnell. “Five years have elapsed since that dread occurrence which deprived me of the best of masters. Did you ever hear the particulars of the circumstance?”

“Partially,” I replied: for all that I had ever heard of the matter was the conversation which had taken place in my presence between Sir Aubrey Clavering and the Twisdens at the *Fountain Hotel* at Canterbury.

“I will tell you,” resumed Mr. Tufnell, “all that is known of the fatal occurrence. It was, as I have just now said, about five years ago,—immediately after his mother’s death,—that Sir Wyndham suddenly absented himself without saying whither he was going or when he should return. This was no uncommon proceeding on his part: for he was in

some respects an eccentric man, although possessed of an excellent heart and noble disposition. He had indeed experienced enough to sadden him—almost indeed to affect his reason: but *that* has nothing to do with my present story. I was telling you, Miss Price, that Sir Wyndham absented himself suddenly. He went away without any servant in attendance—without carriage or riding-horse; and we knew not whither he did go. Six weeks elapsed—and he returned not. This was by far the longest absence he had ever made from home without writing to me; and I grew alarmed, as did all the domestics of the household. One day I was walking along the bank of the river, which is but a mile distant from the Hall, and passes through Sturry —”

“Is it not the river Stour?” I inquired: “the same which runs by Ashford?”

“Yes—the same,” returned Mr. Tufnell: then in continuation of his tale, he went on to say, “I was walking by the side of the river in a very doleful mood, wondering what could have detained my beloved master so long from home, and dreading lest some accident should have befallen him,—when my attention was suddenly attracted to an object at the entrance of a little streamlet flowing out of the river. To my horror I discovered that it was a dead body. Some labourers were at work in a neighbouring field belonging to the estate; and I immediately summoned them to the spot. We dugged out the corpse; but it was so dreadfully decomposed and disfigured, that we did not recognise it. The garments too were covered with mud, and altogether so torn and discoloured that in them we perceived nothing to make us suspect the terrible truth which other circumstances were presently to reveal. The labourers, by my directions, searched the pockets of the deceased to discover some clue to the identity of the drowned man. The watch and seals had remained in the fob; and you may conceive the shock it gave me, Miss Price, when I at once recognized that watch and its appendages as having belonged to Sir Wyndham Clavering. The purse, with a quantity of money in it, likewise contained a signet-ring which Sir Wyndham was accustomed to carry about with him; and thus there could be no doubt that this was the corpse of my beloved master. It was immediately conveyed up to the house, where all the domestics were at once plunged into an indescribable state of consternation and grief. I immediately wrote off to Major Clavering, who was then with his regiment in Dover; and he lost no time in coming across. A coroner’s inquest of course sat upon the body. It presented a most shocking spectacle: the face and all the flesh from the neck had been entirely eaten away by rats or fish — But I will not horrify you by dwelling upon the description. Suffice it to say that the surgeon—the same whom I have just now brought up to the house—could find no indication to make him suspect foul play; and the verdict was accordingly an open one, to the effect of *Found Drowned*. The corpse was interred in the family vault in Sturry church, the coffin being placed next to that of Lady Clavering, Sir Wyndham’s mother—the original of that portrait—who had died only a few weeks previously. Thus was it, Miss Price, that Major Clavering suddenly became a baronet and the possessor of this fine estate.”

“It was indeed a shocking tragedy,” I observed thoughtfully: for I was still wondering what connexion could have existed between the deceased Sir Wyndham and my own poor mother: but not daring to dwell upon the subject,—indeed anxiously and earnestly endeavouring to escape from it—I hastened to remark, “It is very kind of you, Mr. Tufnell, to have shown so great an interest in respect to Lady Talbot just now. I am afraid we must be all putting you to considerable inconvenience —”

“Inconvenience! not at all,” replied the benevolent steward. “And even if it were an inconvenience, it is only a duty which one owes to his fellow-creatures. Very fortunate is it that the accident did not prove fatal, or more serious in its consequences than it is. As for inconvenience, there is nothing of the kind: for Sir Aubrey Clavering is very seldom here. Immediately after he succeeded to the title, he made interest with the Horse Guards to get his regiment removed from Dover to Canterbury; and then he did reside here for some few months. But he obtained frequent permissions of absence to visit London, and Derbyshire, and other places. At length he got tired of the Army, and sold out about a year ago. He is now in London; and when I last heard from him, he gave no intimation of a speedy return. But here am I,” ejaculated Mr. Tufnell, “keeping you in conversation, while you are doubtless anxious to inspect the pictures. I understood from one of the servants that you were here; and I came to bring you a manuscript catalogue of the portraits and other works of art.”

Thus speaking, Mr. Tufnell handed me the catalogue; and observing that he had some matters of business requiring his attention, issued forth from the gallery. I remained there alone. Opening the catalogue, I endeavoured to turn my attention to those pictures which I had not as yet examined: but I found my eyes reverting to the portrait of Sir Wyndham Clavering—and a kind of superstitious awe began to steal over me, with the feeling that the deceased Baronet was really and truly looking out at me from the canvass. I moved away—but soon found myself returning to contemplate that portrait again. Deeper grew the awe—more superstitious the feeling accompanying it: until at length I was actually a prey to a consternation which I could not shake off. I bent my eyes upon the portrait of the mother; and now it seemed to me that her features likewise became animated—that they grew darker and more ominous in look, until their expression settled into a deep stern scowl that frightened me. A cry rose to my lips: but with the accompanying start that I gave, the delusion vanished, and I beheld those features in their stillness on the canvass, but with their lingering traces of a wild and fearful beauty.

I could stay in that gallery no longer. I feared to gaze again upon those portraits, lest they should assume a life-like appearance once more; and I hastened abruptly away. I ascended to the chambers which had been indicated as those allotted to myself, Sarah, and the children;—and there I endeavoured to employ myself by taking from the trunks which had been conveyed thither, such things as were requisite for our use. Happening to open my work-box, I beheld the packet containing the letter with the black seal,—that letter which com-

prised the mystery of my mother's secret! Ah, I could now comprehend why it had a mourning seal: it was written so soon after Lady Wyndham's death. For a moment the temptation to open it was almost irresistible: but I *did* resist—and ashamed of myself for having, even during the swift brief space of a single moment, thought of reading the letter, I quickly locked my work-box again, and descended to the garden, where I found Sarah and the children. My feelings had been much agitated during the past hour: my mind had gone through many phases of painful reminiscence and mournful reflection; and I knew that I was pale. A glance which I had thrown at myself in the mirror up-stairs, had shown me that the colour had left my cheeks: but I did my best to compose the agitation of my soul, in order to avoid exciting Sarah's attention.

There is no necessity to dwell at any greater length upon our temporary sojourn at Sir Aubrey Clavering's mansion: suffice it to say that on the following day Lady Talbot was sufficiently recovered to proceed to Herne Bay; and we accordingly took our departure, Mr. Tufnell receiving the most grateful thanks for the hospitality he had afforded. We arrived at Herne Bay; and I was pleased to find that the house which had been hired for our temporary residence, fronted the sea: indeed it stood close upon the beach. I am now speaking of Herne Bay as it was in the year 1831: I have visited it since, within the last two or three years, and was then enabled to perceive but little alteration in the place, beyond the erection of a new hotel, a clock-tower, and the lengthening of the pier. I have already described it as a straggling town; and such indeed it was, and is at the present time. In consequence of the number of half-built unfinished houses, and others that are dilapidated, it has the appearance of a place that has been bombarded. It is however exceedingly healthy,—the sea-breeze being fresh, without a keen bitterness; and the adjacent country furnishes beautiful views, walks, and drives. At a distance of about four miles from Herne Bay are the ruins of an ancient monastery, the two towers of which, with a fragment of wall, alone remain. On the summit of these towers signal-posts have been erected, and lights are hoisted at night as a warning to mariners against the dangers of the coast in that vicinage. But every person who has sailed or steamed upon the Thames as far as Margate, is familiar with the *Reculvers*—the name by which these towers are known.

In an opposite direction along the coast, and about a mile and a half from Herne Bay, is a singular little colony of fishing people, occupying some half-dozen mean and wretched hovels of the most poverty-stricken description. This little place is called Hampton; and the families dwelling in the huts, are a strange primitive race. They may be literally denominated semi-barbarians: their very appearance is unlike that of the other inhabitants of Kent. They seldom leave their little colony, but internary amongst themselves, and thus exist in a state of complete isolation, and almost inaccessible to every civilizing influence. Their chief pursuit is fishing; and a dyke, or inlet, which they have formed, is so furnished with traps and nets as to catch quantities of fish at particular states of the tide. But fishing is not their only pursuit: they

are ready coadjutors with the smugglers upon the coast; and whatsoever amount of coin circulates amongst them, is chiefly derived from the assistance they render contrabandists in landing cargoes of smuggled goods in the depth of the darkest nights. I have been particular in giving this detailed description of the wretched little fishing hamlet, for reasons that will presently transpire. I must add that the above account I partially received from Fanny, who learnt it a few days after our arrival, from one of the men-servants who visited the place out of curiosity: and I obtained at the time some additional particulars from Lady Talbot, who expressly enjoined me not to take the children, when out walking, near Hampton, as she had heard such dreadful accounts of the uncouth, savage character of its inhabitants as to fill her with horror of the spot.

A week after our arrival at Herne Bay the incident occurred which I am about to relate. My sister Sarah having one day complained of indisposition, staid in-doors; and for some reason which I forget now, the two eldest children likewise remained at home. I took the youngest out to walk with me; and enticed by the exceeding beauty of the weather, I conducted my little companion through the fields to a somewhat greater distance than I had at first intended. I was thinking of many subjects which had claims upon my attention—such as my loved and absent Eustace, Sarah's affection for Edgar Selden, and the discovery I had made at Sir Aubrey Clavering's house in respect to the identity of the late Sir Wyndham with the gentleman whose countenance I had seen years back at the cottage window at Ashford: and thus, by giving way to my meditations, I failed to notice how the walk was prolonged. Presently we emerged from the fields into the main road, close by the village of Herne, which is two miles inland from Herne Bay itself, and has a most picturesque appearance, with its old church, and its little houses of antiquated architecture. I was standing upon a slight eminence just beyond the village, contemplating it from that point,—when a respectfully-dressed female, approaching from behind, and therefore coming from the direction of Canterbury or Sturry, gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise as she came up to the spot where I was lingering with my little companion. I looked round, and at once recognized the Gipsy Queen. She was, as I have already stated, dressed in a respectable manner—in a sort of quiet and neat middle-class garb, but to which her strikingly handsome countenance, her fine figure, and her commanding appearance, gave a certain superiority. She looked somewhat careworn, but not to a degree to mar the beauty of her features: for her eyes shone with all their wonted lustre, and the animation of a feeling of evident pleasure lit up her countenance as she recognized me.

"I knew it was you, Mary Price, by your figure, even before you turned your head:"—and thus speaking, she offered me her hand, which I immediately accepted, although, as the reader may recollect, I was not altogether satisfied with her conduct when last I parted from her in London on the memorable occasion of Lord Harlesdon's suicide. It will be borne in mind that she had solemnly assured me at the time that she was unaware

of Sir Aubrey Clavering's intentions to watch my interview with Lady Davenport in Hyde Park: but on the other hand, her whisperings with Sir Aubrey Clavering after he had so imperiously bade her depart in front of Harlesdon House, had somewhat tended to strengthen my suspicions to the contrary. Thus, as I have said, I had parted from her with some little dissatisfaction in my mind: but I did not choose to exhibit any coldness towards her on this occasion when we encountered close by the village of Herne.

"What are you doing here?" she inquired: then glancing at little Miss Talbot, she said, "I presume you are still in service?"

"I am with Sir Richard and Lady Talbot, who are for the present staying by the sea-side. But now, in my turn, let me ask what has brought you into this neighbourhood?"

A singular expression appeared upon the countenance of Barbauld Azetha as I put that query,—an expression in which there was much bitterness mingled with some stern resolve, as if she had a serious and even ominous settled purpose in view. She did not immediately answer, but appeared to hesitate whether she should do so at all.

"Do not think," I hastened to observe, "that I wish to pry into your affairs. It was a mere casual question that I put, in the same spirit most probably that you put your's concerning myself."

"I know not why I should refuse to answer," she responded slowly and still in a deliberative manner: then she added abruptly, and speaking aside in a whisper, so that my little companion could not catch what she said, "Come into this field—let the child play about by herself—and we can talk."

I was tired with the walk I had taken—I wanted to rest awhile—and there was no particular hurry to return home. I accordingly complied with the Gipsy Queen's request; and we passed into a field close by, where she and I sat down upon a bank beneath the shade of some trees, while the little girl gladly availed herself of my permission to play about in the meadow and gather the daisies and buttercups.

"You are doubtless surprised to see me so far away from London," resumed the Gipsy Queen, "and in such an out-of-the-way place as this. Mary," she exclaimed, with singular abruptness, and fixing upon me a strange look in which wildness and resolute determination were blended—"do you remember once asking me if I knew what love was? do you remember me telling you that inasmuch as I am a woman I was no stranger to that passion? Did I not bid you observe that as I was handsome, so I had been courted? I told you then that I *had* loved—that I loved still—and that I should love on for ever, until the end. Oh! full well, do I recollect, Mary, every word that I uttered upon that occasion. Did I not say that love could be an angel floating on azure wings through the sunlit air, scattering garlands from his brow and goss from his wing; but that he could likewise assume a demon-shape, mercilessly trampling on all the fairest flowers that entwined themselves round the heart. Yes, Mary—it was thus I spoke: and it is as a demon that love has proved himself to me!"

It was with an exceeding bitterness that Barbauld Azetha spoke these last words: but imme-

diately afterwards there was a flush of indignation upon her countenance, and her lips were compressed with the firmness of that resolve which I had already seen was so deeply taken.

"In me," she said, "you behold one of those women whom false man has betrayed and cast off. Mary, I loved profoundly—not with a mere sickly sentimental feeling, but with all the strength of passion. I loved with an ardour that would have induced me to lay down my life for the object of my adoration. I loved with an intensity which ere I knew this love, I had believed myself incapable of. It was not one of my own people whom I loved, and to whom I sacrificed myself. I did not dream of marriage: love deluded me not so far. I knew it to be impossible,—impossible because even if *he* were willing, my own creed, my position, the prejudices and the superstitions—whatever you may choose to call them—of the race to which I belong, would have forbidden me from accompanying a bridegroom to the altar of one of your places of worship. Besides, I was not fool nor idiot enough to suppose that even if these barriers existed not on my side, that *he* could present a gipsy-wife to his friends and before the world. No, no, Mary—I did not dream of marriage! But I *did* believe that he whom I loved, loved me as faithfully and as devotedly in return—that he would remain true to me—that he would adhere to the vows which he solemnly and sacredly made never to love another—and that I should continue the only object of his adoration. Ah! it was a delightful dream—too fond and too delicious to last. There indeed I was insane—mad—raving—lunatic, to put faith in it! But I did: for there is no being in this world, however strong-minded and however intelligent, who does not cherish some delusion in respect to love. And mine has been a delusion. Oh, I have humiliated myself to that man—I have forgotten my pride—my hauteur—and have crouched as it were at his feet. Mine was no gross passion, Mary, although so strong. Without sentimentalism of the sickly school-girl kind, it had a world of tenderness in it—deep—unfathomable. Was such a love as this to be scorned at last? was she who loved with such strength, such passionate ardour, such profound devotion, to see herself rejected for another? Yet it has been so: and I am that rejected being—that humiliated wretch!"

Barbauld Azetha paused; and bending down her eyes, reflected deeply. She had spoken with a wildness that had frightened me—with an earnestness that had awed me—with a sincerity that had interested me. I gazed upon her grandly handsome countenance, as it now wore an expression of mingled melancholy and ominous gloom; and as I beheld the fires flashing from beneath the long dark fringes that at present pointed downward—the lips held apart, revealing the splendid teeth—and the singular blending of varied feelings and passions that formed the expression of her whole countenance, I felt my interest deepening, and I longed to know who was the object of this love of her's—now perhaps the object of her vengeance! I should perhaps have more accurately said, that I longed for the confirmation of the suspicion which had arisen in my mind: for methought that I could conjecture who the individual was of whom she spoke.

"I told you ere now, Mary," the Gipsy Queen

abruptly resumed, "that I love still and shall love on until the end. Nor did I tell you falsely: for it is so. I love that man at the present moment with as fervid a passion as when he was all that I could expect or wish: and yet blended with this love, there is an unappeasable desire of vengeance in my soul!"

"Barbauld," I said, gently interrupting her, "you must permit me to remind you that inasmuch as you are not the wife of him you love, you can scarcely assert upon his affection a claim so strong as to justify you in seeking to punish him for whatsoever coolness he may have shown towards you."

"Claim, Mary Price!" ejaculated the Gipsy Queen, turning round upon me with angry and almost fierce abruptness: "I have every claim! The vows which he has pledged to me, constitute a claim: the love which I bear him, constitutes a claim: the circumstance that I have violated the laws of my race to yield myself up to him, constitutes a claim. Are not all these claims sacred? He has not thought so. With a cool indifference, almost with flippant levity did he tell me, that we must see each other no more—that if I liked he would allow me a few hundreds a-year, but that I must forbear from molesting him in future. This to me! This to me, I say!"—and there was again a terrible fierceness in the accents and looks of the Gipsy Queen. "Ah! what want I with the vile dross that he would have offered to appease me? Is mine a passion that can be quenched even by a river of molten gold, or absorbed in a whole ocean of liquid silver?—is mine a heart which can be restored to the illumination of joy and happiness by hanging diamonds and pearls around it, instead of the fresh flowers of love and fondness which he has trampled under foot? No: ten thousand times no! What remains unto me? Naught but vengeance!—Mary Price," continued the Gipsy Queen, now speaking lower, in a less excited and more solemn manner, "if that man had told me frankly and candidly that he had deceived himself—that it was a transitory and not a permanent passion which he had experienced—and that in parting, he hoped it would be on peaceful and affectionate terms, so that henceforth a true friendly feeling might subsist between us,—had he spoken thus to me, Mary Price, I swear to you that I should have said to him, '*Go: I sacrifice my own to consult your happiness; and henceforth we will be friends, if we cannot be lovers!*'—and then I should not have dreamt of vengeance. But when, indignant and furious at the cool indifference of his manner, and enraged at the offer of money which he made me, I reproached him for the heartless cruelty of his conduct,—he told me I was insane to fancy that whatsoever connexion existed between us could possibly be permanent,—when he gave me to understand that his vows and his promises had been but the snares he had set to inveigle me,—and when, too, with unblushing effrontery he told me to my face that instead of a vagabond gipsy there was a lady of rank and title to whom he now purposed to transfer his attentions—even naming that lady in the superciliousness of his triumph—naming also with an enhancing arrogance of that triumph, the man from whom he had enticed that lady away,—Oh! it was *then*, Mary, that the demon of jealousy laid his fangs upon my heart, and that terrible

thoughts of vengeance rose up within me! I have seen this lady—and truthfully can I tell you that she is not handsomer than I. No: despite your rank, your title, your aristocratic name, what are you, Lady Davenant?"

"Davenant!" I ejaculated, starting with surprise. "Yes," responded the Gipsy Queen, regarding me with astonishment in her turn: "wherefore does that name strike you thus? Do you know her?"

"I have seen her—and I have spoken to her," was my answer, as that terrible interview which I had with her ladyship at Selina's cottage near Winchester, flashed vividly back to my mind.

"Then you yourself can judge whether I have spoken truly?" exclaimed the Gipsy Queen: "you can decide whether she is handsomer than I? But I am not frivolously vain, and I will not make you give a decision upon the subject. Yet it is for this Lady Davenant whose reputation, as I have learnt, is more than damaged—utterly ruined—a worthless, bold-faced woman—profligate without the apology of love for being frail—profligate therefore for profligacy's sake,—it is for this woman that I have been sacrificed! And now do you ask why I am here in this neighbourhood—wherefore I have assumed this garb which in its respectability is for the gipsy a disguise at least sufficient to avert particular notice from her? It is because that man of whom I have been speaking, and his new mistress, have come down to pass the honeymoon of their shameless profligacy at Herne Bay!"

"But that man?" said I inquiringly.

"Oh! doubtless you are at no loss to conjecture who he is. But I will not name him. I have sworn that his name shall never pass my lips again. If however, Mary Price, you are so dull of conjecture that you even suspect not who he is, you will doubtless discover speedily: for he will not fail to parade his aristocratic companion—his brilliant Lady Davenant—in all the public places of your little town. And now I must leave you," said the Gipsy Queen, abruptly starting to her feet.

"But one word, Barbauld," I exclaimed.

"What is it? Speak quickly."

"I cannot suffer myself to remain the depository of this secret of your's under the dreadful circumstances which I apprehend. From your words I gather that you meditate a terrible vengeance—"

"Ah! I comprehend you, Mary," interrupted the Gipsy Queen. "You feel yourself in duty bound to warn those of whom I have been speaking that an enemy is near? Do so, if it will satisfy your conscience. I care not. I shall cherish no ill-feeling against you if you do. On the contrary, I wish you to take that step. It will fill them with apprehensions—it will excite the direst alarms in their soul—it will poison the sweets of their present happiness: while on the other hand, it will not prove the slightest barrier to the execution of that vengeance which I cherish. But think not that I mean murder. No, no, Mary Price!"—and the Gipsy Queen laughed scornfully. "There are other ways of wreaking a bitter vengeance without having recourse to a crime that could not fail to leave the horrors of remorse behind it."

With these words Barbauld Azetha hurried away; and emerging from the field, was soon lost to my view behind the trees that skirted the road-side. Her last words had conveyed a considerable relief

to my mind. She had spoken with a mingled solemnity and sincerity that I could not for an instant mistrust. It was clear that she meditated naught against the lives of those whom she regarded with such deep-seated animosity; but of what nature would her vengeance be? This was a question which defied conjecture. Should I be doing a duty by putting Lady Davenant and her companion, whoever he might prove to be, upon their guard? or should I be only making myself an instrument of Barbauld's vengeance by exciting the most rending alarms in their hearts? For Lady Davenant's feelings I could have no over-delicate consideration; while to warn her against the effects of a sworn foe's enmity, was plainly a Christian duty. This course, therefore, I resolved to adopt; and beckoning towards me the little girl who throughout the preceding colloquy had been playing in the field, I began to retrace my way in a homeward direction. The child asked me "who that woman was?"—and I told her it was a person whom I had known in London. She was not naturally inquisitive, and soon ceased to think of the woman altogether. As we proceeded along the road I vainly looked in advance to see if I could catch a glimpse of the Gipsy Queen; and as she was not to be seen, I concluded that she might possibly have stopped in the village of Herne, towards which her steps had been directed when she parted from me.

Taking a short cut across the fields, I and my little companion entered Herne Bay in about three quarters of an hour; and as we were repairing homeward, I beheld a lady and gentleman approaching—the former of whom I instantaneously recognized to be Lady Davenant—and the latter, as I had vaguely suspected, Sir Aubrey Clavering.

CHAPTER CV.

THE BEACH, THE BOAT, AND THE HUT.

My first impulse was to turn back; for I could endure the sight of neither of those persons: but a second thought told me that it would appear as if I were actually afraid to meet them if I did so—and what reason had I for being ashamed? I therefore quickly assumed a calm composed demeanour; and leading little Miss Talbot by the hand, continued my way, keeping my eyes half-averted and partially bent downward, so as not to be compelled to notice them. But they did not appear inclined to be treated thus—or rather Lady Davenant did not: for the moment she recognized me, she stopped short, thereby compelling Sir Aubrey Clavering, on whose arm she leant, to do the same.

"Ah! is that you?" she exclaimed: and as I mechanically turned my looks upon her, I was shocked at beholding the brazen hardihood of profligacy shining as it were in triumph upon her countenance. "I am glad I have met you, because you remember what I said when last we saw each other; and now you can write to my sister, with whom I have no doubt you correspond, and can tell her that Captain Tollemache has been thrust aside for Sir Aubrey Clavering."

"Then, Mary Price is an acquaintance of your's, Gertrude?" said the baronet, eyeing me with su-

perilous impudence. "She is also an acquaintance of mine, after a fashion——"

"One word, Sir Aubrey Clavering!—one word also with you, Lady Davenant!"—and I spoke with decision and courage, not unblended, I may flatter myself, with a becoming dignity. "Circumstances have made me aware that there is in the neighbourhood a certain female who harbours no friendly feeling towards either of you. You would therefore do well each to be upon your guard. It was my duty, as a fellow-creature and as a Christian—also through the respect I owe to the law and to society—to give you this warning. Rest assured that for no other purpose should I have lingered a moment in your presence."

"Ah! it is Barbauld of whom she is speaking," ejaculated Clavering; and an expression of uneasiness appeared upon his countenance. "Stop one moment, Mary—and tell us what she said."

"I have nothing more that I choose to say," was my cold response,—“unless it be to assure her ladyship that I should be the last to forward to Mrs. Cleveland any intelligence that could shock and afflict her.”

The ironical, haughty, supercilious laugh of Lady Davenant sounded on my ears as I walked away with my little companion; and not once turning my head, we regained the house. At the moment we reached the door, Fanny was issuing forth with a letter in her hand; and she stopped to make some civil observation, to the effect that "she hoped we had enjoyed our walk:" for the maid-servant had taken a very great liking towards me, and was always anxious to give me a proof of her gratitude for the way in which I treated her and by my example had led Sarah to conduct herself towards her. I gave some kind answer to her remark, and was passing on, when my eye accidentally caught the address of the letter which she held in her hand; and at once recognizing Sarah's writing, I did not hesitate to read that address, which I was enabled to do by the way in which Fanny was holding it. A sensation seized upon me like that of a sudden pang at the heart, as I thus caught the address of the particular tradesman in London under cover to whom was Sarah's correspondence with Edgar Selden to be forwarded. My first impulse was to snatch the letter from Fanny's hand: my second to bid her give it to me without assigning any reason. But I did neither: for at the moment I could decide upon nothing. She accordingly hurried away, and either through want of presence of mind, or else through disinclination to expose my sister in any way—perhaps through both causes—I did not call her back. But no sooner was she out of sight, when I repented of this wavering and irresolution on my part: for how did I know what the letter might contain—what folly Sarah was committing—what might be the results? However, it was too late to intercept the letter now: and with most disagreeable feelings did I ascend to the room which served as the nursery.

Sarah was seated there with the two elder children; and when she raised her eyes as I entered, there was not the slightest confusion in her looks—not the least betrayal of a sense of deception and wrong-doing on her part. I did not take any notice of the incident, but passed into the adjacent room to put off my things and gain time to reflect what

course I should adopt. That Sarah was corresponding clandestinely with Edgar Selden, was but too painfully evident. Had she contrived to receive letters in a similarly clandestine manner from him? But in any case, the mere fact that she had thus written secretly to Edgar, showed that all was not right, but that some mischief was meditated: or else wherefore violate the compact which was to the effect that they were to write but seldom, and that I was to see all their correspondence? Oh, I shed tears—bitter, bitter tears, as I thought of the consummate duplicity of my sister—that sister who had thus dared to look me steadily in the face within only a few minutes after she had been acting in such direct contravention of my advice and wishes! I trembled for her too—yes, I did tremble in very agony, as I thought of the ruin into which she would plunge herself if she thus gave way to the infatuation of her feelings and the delusive promises of Edgar Selden. For that he was now seeking to entice her away from his aunt's service and from my protection, I seriously apprehended.

But what was I to do? Should I at once charge her with her hypocrisy and her deceitfulness? No: she would doubtless fling off the mask at once, assume a bold hardihood, and assert her right to the control of her own actions. Should I remonstrate gently with her? Alas! the reader has already seen enough of her disposition and her character to be well aware that the mildest reproaches would be as unavailing as the strongest rebukes. Then what could I do? There appeared to be no course open but to redouble my vigilance—watch her here at Herne Bay as I had watched her at Talbot Abbey—and never afford her the opportunity of writing unknown to me, or of getting out of my sight. There was also a plan which struck me, but which I was loath to put into execution: this was, privately to request Fanny to give me in future any letters that my sister might entrust to her or that might be brought to the house for her. It was painful to adopt this course—but it was urgent; and I availed myself of the first opportunity to speak to Fanny upon the subject, without however giving special reasons for the request I thus made. She cheerfully promised to comply, and then told me that she had two days previously fetched from the post-office a letter which, bearing the London post mark, had been addressed thus—“*Miss Sarah Price, Herne Bay; to be kept till called for.*” I thanked Fanny for the promise she had made, as well as for the information she now gave me; and bade her be silent on the subject.

The complexion of the affair appeared serious and alarming indeed; and it was with no small degree of difficulty that I could compose my feelings in the presence of Sarah, or prevent her from seeing that there was something on my mind. Again did I think of telling Lady Talbot everything: but she was a woman whose conduct in any particular case was so little to be relied upon, that I feared if I did, she would dismiss my sister—and in that case Sarah would at once fly to her lover. No: after duly and seriously deliberating upon the subject, I saw that the only course was to keep a vigilant watch, and without scruple or delicacy open any correspondence that might fall into my hands on the part of Sarah and Edgar Selden.

Three or four days passed without any incident

worthy of record; and Sarah invented no farther plea of indisposition to remain at home at the usual hours when we were accustomed to walk out. I hoped therefore that she did not perceive I was renewing the vigilance I had exercised at Talbot Abbey. But one evening we remained out rather later than usual—it came on to rain—we had no umbrellas, and got very wet. Sarah caught a severe cold; and in this illness there was no affectation. The medical attendant who visited at the house, ordered her to keep her room for a day or two; and unfortunately the weather changed again and became brilliantly fine. I could not possibly devise any excuse to remain altogether in-doors for those two days that Sarah was an invalid—especially as Lady Talbot herself, coming up into the nursery, charged me with two or three little commissions for her at a linendraper's when I went out. I however enjoined Fanny to keep a close watch respecting letters; and to ensure Sarah's obeying the doctor's injunctions and remaining at home, I on some pretext left the two eldest children with her, taking only the youngest with me. I resolved that our walk should not be very long, and speedily despatched the commissions with which I was charged by Lady Talbot. I then took the little girl to the cliffs, where I sat down upon a bench while she played about in the usual manner. I had not been seated there many minutes, before I perceived the Gipsy Queen approaching me. She was dressed just as I had seen her near the village of Herne a few days previously, and now wore a thick veil over her countenance. But by her majestic walk, blended with a certain amount of natural elegance, did I recognize her, as well as by her garb; and I thought that if it were to avoid the special observation of Sir Aubrey Clavering that she wore the veil, it would be useless indeed.

“Again we meet, Mary Price,” she said, proffering me her hand: then seating herself by my side, she observed, “Doubtless by this time you have discovered who is the man that I have loved so passionately?”

“I met him,” was my answer, “with Lady Davenant, on the same day, and indeed within an hour after I parted from you at Herne.”

“And did you warn them both to be upon their guard?”

“I did so: for I conceived it to be my duty.”

“I do not blame you, Mary: I told you that I should not. My vengeance is not sleeping, although they have not as yet felt even the first blow. But it will come—and yet not in a way to make you shudder when you hear of it,—at least not for any crime which will be perpetrated direct by my hand.”

“You would show a nobler feeling, Barbauld,” said I, “and one that would elevate you considerably in my opinion, if you abandoned these ideas of vengeance.”

“Enough, Mary Price, upon that subject!” remarked the Gipsy Queen curtly: and now as she raised her veil, and looked me very hard in the face with the full power of her really magnificent eyes, she said to me in her wonted tone of confidence, “You wished to see me?”

“Ah! how do you know it?” I ejaculated: then as various recollections of the past on which I had for the last few days been pondering, came back to

my mind, I observed, "But of course you must know that I began to have an insight into some little matters wherein you were enabled to affect all the mystery of your race; and therefore it is no wonder you should surmise that I am desirous to have cleared up whatsoever is yet dark to my comprehension."

"You are a good girl, Mary—and I will affect," said the Gipsy Queen, smiling, "no more mystery with you. Ask me any questions you choose—and I will truly and faithfully respond to them."

"You remember, Barbauld," said I, "that on the first occasion you ever exercised your skill in palmistry with regard to me, you expressly declared that the month of November of 1829, was to be fraught with some importance to my interests?"—and I felt that I was blushing as I thus spoke hesitatingly and tremulously.

"Ah, I remember!" said the Gipsy Queen, smiling archly: "I really did succeed in making a certain impression upon you! It was the whim of the moment on my part—or rather I should say, that habit has become second nature, and that I can never lose an opportunity of exciting wonder and superstitious awe by mysterious allusions to anything which having come to my knowledge, specially concerns those with whom I may converse. But you must confess, my dear Mary, that when I explained to you the uses of the great book you saw at my house in St. Giles's, I was treating you as a friend, and to a certain extent unveiling the mysteries of my craft. But then, as the opportunity presented itself the very next moment to mystify you, I fell naturally into the temptation, performing my part as mechanically as a juggler may cut a summerset in the middle of a field when out for a walk by himself, and no one by to see him."

"But you have not yet answered my question," I said, unable to repress a smile at the simile with which Barbauld's speech had wound up.

"I am coming to that point," she answered. "Of course you have already conjectured that from that man whose name I will not mention, I received an account of the attachment which existed between yourself and a certain Eustace Quentin. Do not blush, dear Mary: it is an honourable love—and now that I know you so well, and love you myself, I sincerely hope it will be prosperous. But to continue—I need scarcely remind you of that occasion when Mr. Quentin—or rather Captain Quentin, as I believe he now is—first confessed to you his love. Was it not in Derbyshire? was it not in the neighbourhood of Harlesdon Park? was it not on a certain day when Eustace Quentin rescued you from some attempted rudeness on the part of that man whose name I cannot mention? Well, upon that occasion, this man—instead of hastening away from the spot—made a short circuit, stole behind the hedges and trees, and was thus enabled to plant himself at no great distance from the place where you and Captain Quentin remained. There he overheard the greater portion of your discourse—especially all the latter part of it—and consequently learnt the appointment which you gave each other for the 1st of November, 1829."

"Ah, the black treachery of such conduct!" I exclaimed, my cheeks now red with indignation.

"Oh! but perhaps you are not aware of the meanness the pettiness and the paltriness to which

that man is capable of descending?" said the Gipsy Queen. "And yet who is more careful of what he calls his honour, than himself? Let another gentleman tell him he is a traitor, a liar, or an unprincipled seducer, and his blood would boil: nothing but pistols and a duel would give him satisfaction! Yet this man, Mary, condescended to the degrading littleness of writing anonymous letters to Eustace Quentin and to Lord Wilborton——"

"I have all along known that such letters were written, and have suspected the author:"—and I felt every vein tingling with the hot blood of indignation, as it coursed with unwonted rapidity throughout my entire frame.

"It was only recently that I learnt he had been guilty of such paltriness," continued the Gipsy Queen. "He one day, when excited with wine, communicated it to me as an excellent joke. Had I known it before, I would have used whatsoever influence I once possessed with him to dissuade him from so vile a proceeding. But now, to return to the subject of those mystifications that I practised towards you," she continued, with another arch smile. "The second time you were with me in St. Giles's, I again displayed my skill in palmistry. You remember I told you that the month of November of 1829, had left behind it many hopes wherewith to cheer you. It required no particular shrewdness to suggest that observation; for although you had been recently ill at Harlesdon House, and were in low spirits on account of her ladyship's death, yet I had little difficulty in perceiving that your cares were rather on account of others than for yourself—and therefore I knew that you were not pining with a disappointed and a hopeless love."

"When I met you in the street, at the time of which you are speaking," I said,—"I mean a few weeks after poor Lady Harlesdon's death—you told me at once that you knew I wished to speak to you about her ladyship. How did you know that?"

"I did not know it: but I know what human nature is. I was well aware how you had loved your noble mistress, and that her loss was uppermost in your thoughts: therefore I touched a chord to which your heart immediately vibrated in response. From that man whom I cannot name, I had learnt the particulars of the tragedy: I knew therefore that it was a premeditated murder on Lord Harlesdon's part. I hesitated not to make the assertion most emphatically to you. I was well aware that the man now nameless, entertained a bitter burning hatred against Lord Harlesdon; and that on this account he sought to avenge her ladyship's death. In my infatuated passion I would have done anything to serve him; and when I met you, knowing how deeply you were acquainted with all Lady Harlesdon's secrets, I thought you would prove an instrument in consummating the desired vengeance against Lord Harlesdon. I need not tell you how Lord Harlesdon was watched when he met Lady Davenport in the Park—or how their conversation was overheard. Then it struck me that if her ladyship were brought face to face with you, she would be dismayed, knowing how devoted you were to the deceased Lady Harlesdon—how you were acquainted with her secrets—how you might possess the means of vengeance—and that in you



she would consequently see an avengeress. I therefore concluded that she would confess everything in order to screen herself, no matter how deeply she involved Lord Harlesdon. The result was as I had anticipated."

"But Sir Aubrey Clavering," I observed: "how came he to be present in the Park?"

"As a matter of course, Mary, he knew every step that was being taken. I told him all: it was *his* vengeance that I was working out, aided by *you*. He promised faithfully that he would not come to the interview—and I believed him: for at that time there was nothing he said which I did not blindly believe. Remember well, Mary, the assurance I subsequently gave you relative to that subject. I did not affirm I had told that man nothing: I merely swore to you, by all that I deemed most holy, that I had not the slightest idea of his presence in the Park until he revealed himself so suddenly."

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"That is true," I observed, now recollecting the precise terms in which she had spoken at the time.

"You doubtless considered my conduct suspicious, because when you and I, speeding in pursuit of that man, overtook him at the entrance of Harlesdon House—and when he bade me depart abruptly, and I obeyed him——"

"But first you spoke apart in whispers."

"Yes," replied Barbauld: "his manner cut me to the quick. At that time I did not wish any one to know of the intimacy subsisting between us—least of all you, whose good opinion I valued. I saw that he was in a mood in which he would recklessly and thoughtlessly betray the secret. I therefore drew him aside to remind him that you were ignorant thereof, and that it was unkind and ungenerous on his part to address me in a tone of command which proved that he was enabled to exercise an influence over me. Ah! you saw how

submissive I was. Judge by that, Mary, how much I loved him! What, I—the Gipsy Queen—ruling the whole Zingari race in this island—to crouch at his feet! Oh, when I think of all the humiliations to which this mad passion of mine led me to submit, it nearly drives me wild!”—and her eyes flashed fire as she spoke.

“Now, Barbauld,” I said, in a grave voice,—for I was approaching a solemn subject,—“do, I conjure you, tell me if you spoke truly in respect to that man whom you called by the name of Graham. Circumstances have very recently come to my knowledge, which have painfully revived, with increased vividness, the interest I feel in my father’s fate—if indeed it were possible that this interest could ever have been diminished or have slumbered at all.”

“Mary,” replied the Gipsy Queen, “I have nothing more or less than what I have previously said, to tell you upon that subject. But, Ah!” she suddenly exclaimed: “here are those whom I do not wish to meet at present. Farewell, Mary: we shall doubtless see each other again shortly.”

With these words Barbauld Azetha rose from the seat—drew the veil over her countenance—and sped away along the cliffs in the contrary direction from the town. In this other direction I quickly glanced; and, as she had intimated, I beheld Sir Aubrey Clavering and Lady Davenant slowly approaching. Not choosing to encounter them again, I descended the slope of the cliff—joined little Miss Talbot, who was playing there—and conducted her down to the beach, along which we pursued our way homeward. On reaching the house, from which I had been absent scarcely two hours, I learnt from Fanny that no letters had been given to her to post—nor had she been sent to fetch any from the office—and on ascending to the nursery, I found Sarah with the two eldest children.

In the evening Lady Talbot sent up a message desiring to speak to me in the drawing-room. I accordingly went down to ascertain her ladyship’s wishes—when she asked me if I could do a certain piece of fancy-work for her with some of the materials that she had commissioned me to purchase that day at the linendraper’s. I at once undertook to accomplish what her ladyship desired; and when she had given me her instructions, she kept me for some time listening to an entire catalogue of her complaints—her indisposition—her nervousness—her head-aches—and so forth; assuring me that although she had completely recovered from the bruises occasioned by the upsetting of the carriage, yet the sea-air had as yet done nothing for her general health. The only occasions in which Lady Talbot did not find it too exhausting to talk, were when she held forth upon her ailments: and thus she kept me in discourse for at least half-an-hour. As I was returning again to the nursery, I met Fanny on the stairs; and she beckoned me into her bed-chamber.

“Miss Sarah,” she said, “has just availed herself of your absence to tell me to run out to the post-office and see if there is a letter for her; if so, to give it to her when your back is turned. She said that she should have told me in the day-time—only she knew I could not go out then; but now all my work is done for the day, she thought I could easily slip as far as the office for her.”

“I am very much obliged to you, Fanny,” said I: “but in order to save you from experiencing my sister’s ill-will, should she discover that you have intercepted the letter, I will go and fetch it myself.”

I thereupon ascended to the nursery—put on my bonnet and shawl—and saying that I should not be five minutes, issued forth. Sarah doubtless supposed that Lady Talbot had given me some commission to execute, and did not ask whether I was going.

The post-office was not above five minutes’ walk from the house: it not merely overlooked the beach, but stood on the very verge of it. It was about half-past nine o’clock, and the evening was dark: for the sky was cloudy, and its aspect threatened a storm. I ran quickly along; for at that hour the place seemed quite deserted—and as there were no lamps, it was cheerless and gloomy to a degree. I arrived in front of the post-office; and was just about to enter the little shop where it was held, when I distinctly heard a female voice say, “There she is!” Then, quick as lightning, I was pounced upon by a couple of men, one of whom placed his hand upon my mouth so abruptly and held it there so tight, that I literally had not time to cry out ere the power to do so was thus suddenly choked. What followed was the work of an instant. A third man appearing on the spot, I was caught up in the arms of two, while the other still held his hand forcibly over my mouth; and notwithstanding I struggled desperately, was hurried down the beach and put into a boat, in which two more men were seated with their oars in readiness to ply. The boat was instantaneously pushed off; and away it flew, the oars (which were no doubt muffled) not creating the slightest splashing sound.

Not a word was spoken. The hand still pressed upon my mouth, so that I could only breathe with difficulty through my nostrils; but all sense of physical pain was lost in the stupor of consternation into which I had fallen. Even if that hand had been at once removed, I do not think I should have had the energy to cry out. All my vital powers seemed paralyzed by the suddenness of this incident and the awful horror that filled my soul.

“Speak but a word—and it is your last,” said a gruff voice, accompanying the threat with a shocking imprecation which I of course suppress: and then the hand of the man who had thus spoken, was withdrawn from my mouth.

“For mercy’s sake spare me,” I said as soon as with gasping difficulty I recovered the power of utterance; and I fell upon my knees in the midst of the three men who had conveyed me into the boat.

“Get up,” replied the one who had already spoken. “We ain’t going to do nothing with you here—so don’t be afraid.”

“Then whither are you taking me?” I asked, the stupor of consternation changing into the lancinating poignancy of an indescribable anguish.

“Hold your tongue: you will see all in good time. But don’t cry out—or it will be the worse for you, I can tell you.”

I saw indeed, not merely that I was completely in the power of these men, but that the boat was already far enough from the shore for any shriek of mine, however wildly thrilling, to be heard there but faintly, if heard at all: and I felt but with a

too bitter keenness how easy it would be for these ruffians to throttle me with their iron grasp, or stun me with a blow and consign me to the deep. Good heavens! what new calamity was this?—for what fearful purpose had I been borne away? Again did all those wildering, maddening thoughts which had swept through my brain when I was carried off by the Bulldog and Sawbridge at Walmer,—again, I say, did similar thoughts pass like a hurricane through my mind—thoughts of those who would soon be wondering at my absence—thoughts of what opinion would be entertained when it was found that I returned not. O horror! it was more than I could endure! I shuddered and shivered from head to foot at one moment;—and at the next my blood seemed to be liquid flames: my hair stood up by the roots—and the ghastliest horrors agitated like demons in my mind. But who were these ruffians that had carried me off? It assuredly was not in a moment of calmness that I threw my looks around upon them: but it was in one of frenzied agony, to see if I could glean from their appearance or their countenances any clue to the fate, they might have in store for me. The reader may have perhaps fancied that I was again in the power of the Bulldog and Sawbridge—but it was not so: although the horrible idea that those murderers,—murderers indeed as I knew them to be,—were connected with the present proceeding, was in my harrowed fancy. They were not however amongst my captors. These three individuals, as well as the two who were rowing, all had the appearance of the lowest possible grade of sailors or fishermen. As far as the light would permit,—and there was a clearer glimmering on the water than on the land,—I could see enough of their countenances to read but little hope *there*, if their purpose were a murderous one. There was a kind of savage gloominess and sullen brutality in their looks which was enough to make the blood turn to ice in the veins, and to freeze upon the lips the very breath on which intercessions for mercy were to be wafted forth. Prayers to them!—no, no—it was ridiculous! They had the aspect of monsters capable of any iniquity, no matter how black—how enormous. Vainly do I seek for words to convey a sense of the mingled anguish and horror which I endured on that fearful evening!

My feelings were wrought to a degree of tenderness that could not possibly last long: they were in that state when they must either terminate in a sudden outburst of maniac frenzy—or else sink into a dull dead stupor. It was the latter change which took place. A dimness came over my vision—I no longer beheld the flickering lights of the town, nor the glimmering upon the water: my physical energies appeared to be dying out—and I sank down in the bottom of the boat, not exactly in a swoon, but crushed beneath the weight of a fearful consternation. How long I remained in this condition I know not: but as nearly as I can judge, it must have been an hour. I was suddenly aroused by a shock which the boat received as it ran upon the shore; and starting up, I in a moment experienced all the dire and dreadful reality of the circumstances by which I was surrounded, but which during my stupor had been mingling in dull and languid confusion in my mind, like the incidents of a heavy dream. Where was I? An almost pitchy darkness prevailed on the land; while the glimmer-

ing on the sea ceased at the water's edge. Vainly in the agony of my terror did my eyes seek to penetrate that darkness. A few objects, darker than the darkness itself, appeared amongst that dense obscurity: but whether they were dwellings, or merely the irregular shapes of the cliff, I could not tell.

"Now then, you must land here," said one of the men: and I was compelled to step forth from the boat upon the pebbly shore. At that instant some syllables of intercession fell from my lips, but in a faint murmuring tone, without producing any effect—and indeed without eliciting any response.

Two of the men compelled me to walk between them, while the others remained behind to drag the boat up on the beach. Gradually I recovered my presence of mind; and I remember that I said to myself, "Now, Mary Price, if ever there were a moment in your life that required all your energy, it is now." I thus suddenly asserted within myself the will to become armed with fortitude; and thereby I obtained the power. Nevertheless, there was still a cold horror—profound, glacial, tremendous—enveloping my soul: but my courage was rising in proportion as it seemed that I advanced nearer and nearer to the crisis of my fate.

On first descending from the boat, the men were compelled almost to drag me, and certainly to support me, for a few yards up the beach: but as my presence of mind returned, I was enabled to walk of my own accord. And now I began to discern that the objects I had seen were indeed the cliffs, forming a high and uneven background for the dark scene stretching before me; while immediately in front were some few little habitations towards which we were advancing, and from the window of one of which a faint light glimmered. All in a moment an idea flashed to my mind. The description which on first arriving at Herne Bay, I had received of the little fishing-village of Hampton, came back to my recollection; while the aspect of these men who had carried me off, seemed but too well to coincide with the delineation given me of their rough and semi-savage appearance. Good heavens! was it amongst these brutalized, half-barbarian people that I now found myself? But for what purpose. Oh! again I felt that this was indeed a moment when all my courage was needed!

The two men between whom I walked, and whose iron grasp was fixed upon my arm on either side, conducted me onward in silence to that hut whence the light glimmered. On reaching the door, three distinct knocks were given with the hard knuckles of one of my captors. Immediately the light shone more brightly through the little window of the hut, as if it were suddenly shifted from one place to another at the sound of that signal. Then the door was opened—I was forced over the threshold into the wretched poverty-stricken interior of the hut—and there I found myself face to face with the Bulldog and Sawbridge!

Not a sound escaped my lips. I did not shriek—I did not give utterance to even the faintest cry: for a moment I was paralyzed with awful horror. But only for a moment did this state of feeling last. A sense of my desperate condition flamed up with a kind of volcanic power within me. The two men who brought me thither, lingered upon the threshold, while one of them asked, "Is it all right?"—to

which the Bulldog responded, "Yes, it's right enough: this is the gal!"—whereupon the two men abruptly retreated, closing the door behind them. There I now was, alone with the two greatest miscreants at that moment upon the earth!

I had staggered back, or had else recoiled from the presence of the murderers, into a corner of the one wretched room which constituted the hut: while Sawbridge and the Bulldog stood gazing upon me with looks expressive of a gloating, savage, brutal satisfaction. The furniture of that miserable place consisted of an old ricketty table, and three or four rude chairs with rush seats, all broken. There was a shelf with a few articles of crockery; and a quantity of fishing-tackle was suspended to the walls. A candle, stuck in a lump of clay, stood upon the table—together with a bottle of spirits, a broken jug containing water, a mug, pipes, and tobacco. The atmosphere of the place was redolent of the smell of hollands and the fumes of the weed.

"Now, Mary Price," said Ben Bulldog, speaking in a tone of savage resolution, and fixing his ferocious looks upon me, "we want to have a little particklar conversation with you—so you had better sit down, and we'll sit too."

"There's a cheer," observed Sawbridge, placing a seat (such as it was) near where I was standing. He and the Bulldog then resumed their own seats: but they did not re-light their pipes nor touch their liquor—they seemed to be both imbued with the consciousness that the interview was indeed one of solemn gravity—of vital importance to themselves, and involving at least *one* terrible alternative. The circumstance that there was to be a parley, inspired me with a feeling of hope: for my first idea had been, on finding myself in the presence of these miscreants, that my immediate immolation to their vengeance was the one and only object for which I had been brought thither. I sat down on the chair which Sawbridge had placed near me; and without speaking a word, showed that I was in readiness to listen to whatsoever the villains might have to say.

"Mary Price," resumed the Bulldog, who invariably acted as spokesman on important occasions, "I need not tell you that you're entirely in our power. If you scream out ever so loud, there is not a soul that will come near you. There's nothing to prevent us from knocking you on the head; and there's a dyke close by where we can sink you, and which will tell no tales. You've seen enough of us at different times, to know that we ain't over particklar in what we do: but now we are more desperate than ever. I suppose you can guess what we have had you fetched here for? Well," he continued, as I still remained silent, "since you don't choose to speak, we shall see whether we can't make you."

"I shall speak," was my answer, "when it is necessary to do so. I am listening to every word you say:"—but it was with a cold inward shuddering that I thus addressed these monsters, whose hands I knew to be embrued with the blood of foul murder.

"Well, it's a good sign that you have found your tongue at length," continued the Bulldog: "so I will come to the point. You went to Maidstone and told such things that got Tom Scudder off; but through what you said, suspicion was thrown upon us. We know everything that took place. Anne,"

—alluding to the woman called Mrs. Sawbridge—"went to Maidstone and gathered all particklars: so you see we ain't in the dark in no respect. Now, the fact is, if we get taken, or if we surrender ourselves up for trial, it's *your* evidence that must do the business one way or t'other. We don't want to play at hide-and-seek all the rest of our lives, with the reward for our apprehension hanging over our heads; and so we resolved, knowing through Anne that you was at Herne Bay, to play a bold stroke and put an end to this here state of things."

It now occurred to me that the female voice which I had heard, at the instant of my capture, and which made me known to the men who took me in front of the post-office, must have been that of Mrs. Sawbridge; but I did not recognize it at the time.

"Of course," continued the Bulldog, speaking in quite a business-like way, and with a consecutive line of reasoning, which showed that he and Sawbridge had well discussed all the circumstances, chances, and eventualities of their position,—“of course the written evidence you gave to Justice Baldwin and Lawyer Atkinson, would hold good against us on trial, even if you wasn't there as a witness to repeat it. So if we must stand a chance of swinging, we shall at least have had the satisfaction of knowing that we have been revenged on you. For we mean, unless on certain conditions, to put an end to *your* career within the hour that is now passing."

A cold shudder convulsed me from head to foot at this horrible threat,—a shudder too that was all the more violent and accompanied with all the more poignant agony of feeling, because I began to comprehend the motive which the villains had in view; and I knew that I should be unable to subscribe to the conditions they were about to lay down. But I still retained a certain degree of fortitude; and my mind had a horrible clearness to comprehend everything that was passing, as well as the frightful dangers of my predicament.

"And now for the conditions," resumed the Bulldog. "You said in your evidence to Justice Baldwin and Lawyer Atkinson, that you overheard a certain conversation betwixt me and Sawbridge, behind a boat on Deal beach, in the dark. You also said that you recognized my clasp-knife. Now, it's only these things that could bring Plummers' business home to us. So you have got to decide whether you will swear upon the Bible that you will go into court and contradict every word you said on them two points—or whether you will have your throat cut now, and be chucked into the dyke, never more to be heard of?"

Although I was fully prepared, by what the Bulldog had previously said, for these alternatives—the former so impossible, the latter so frightful—I could not help shuddering again, and with a violence too which failed not to catch the penetrating looks that were fixed upon me.

"You see, Mary Price," continued the Bulldog, "what confidence we put in you. We know very well that if you swear, here to us, upon the Bible, that you will do a certain thing, you will do it. It is all plain and easy enough. You will only have to say that you couldn't swear to the voices you heard behind the boat on Deal beach, and that you may have misrepresented what you did hear said there. As for the knife, you can say that

looking at it again and more careful, you would not like to swear it was the same you saw in my hands at Ashford. Now, you see, if you talk in this manner before the Judge, you won't be telling no lies: because how the deuce *could* you recognize our voices when you didn't see us? or how *could* you recollect a partiklar knife when there's thousands like it? But mind!—there's another thing I must tell you; and it is this:—Suppose you swear at once to what we want, and on the strength of your promise we go and surrender ourselves up, saying that we have only just hea. l that we were suspected, and that as we are innocent we don't hesitate to stand our trial. Well, I say, suppose that when all this takes place, you do turn round on us and stick to everything you first said. Well, you would get us tucked up with hempen neck-cloths, it is true: but do you think you would be safe? No—not a bit on't. For there is Nan who is sworn to have your life, even though she also had to swing for it afterwards. She would have your life, I say—and there's no mistake about it. Me, and Sawbridge, and Nan have talked the whole thing over and over again; and we've looked at it in all its bearings. So now you understand; and you've got five minutes to make up your mind whether you will swear as we want you, or whether you will make us do to you as we did to the sailor chap at Deal."

Five minutes! then it was merely a respite of five minutes? for I would sooner die than swear to the conditions imposed by the murderous ruffian. Five minutes of respite! And was I then looking death in the face? was there no hope? No: there appeared to be none. There could be no longer any doubt that it was the fishing village of Hampton to which I had been brought; and from all I had heard of the inhabitants of the place, it was not to be expected that any one single soul amongst them would fly to my succour. Oh, to die—to die thus young!—to leave the world which was not without its bright hopes for me! To disappear from the scene without leaving a trace to denote my fate! to disappear, too, in a way that would allow scandal to invent its own tales, and malice to disseminate the most calumnious conjectures! Ah, and to leave the world at the very moment when my sister was standing upon the brink of a precipice—Oh, it was horrible, horrible! Never shall I forget the wild agony of my thoughts. The images of Eustace Quentin—Sarah—William—Jane—even Robert, who cared nothing for me,—all, all, rose up vividly before me—all were passed in array through my wildering, tortured, harrowed brain! Oh, what was to become of me? Was there no hope?" I glanced to the door: should I attempt to fly? Preposterous—with those ruffians seated but two yards distant, their looks fixed upon me, and themselves ready to intercept my flight! Should I take the oath they enjoined as the only means of saving my life, and then violate it afterwards? Would there be any crime in this? Oh! yes, yes,—to swear falsely upon the Bible, even to save my life, was a crime which I only contemplated for a moment to avert my mental vision therefrom with a shuddering recoil. I must die, then: there was no alternative that I could accept—no hope to which I could cling. But the five minutes were passing—the knell of doom already seemed to be ringing in my ears: and from one pocket the Bulldog was now

producing a book—from the other a pistol. The former was the Bible, upon which I was to be sworn; and the other was the weapon with the butt-end of which I was to be stunned ere thrown into the dyke. Yes—the five minutes were passing; and in the looks of the two murderers I beheld a stern dogged resolution. Sinking from my chair, I fell upon my knees, and began offering up my prayers to heaven.

"She refuses, then?" said the Bulldog, in a deep sullen tone that in itself was enough to stifle hope if I had been sanguine or insensate enough to cling to any: and as he spoke, he rose slowly from his seat.

Sawbridge likewise rose; and now I prayed aloud in an anguished voice—for I felt assured that my last moment was at hand. I was kneeling by the chair, on which my elbows rested; and my countenance was upturned as I thus prayed. There must have been mortal anguish depicted on it: for if ever the human features can painfully and truly reflect what is passing within the soul, mine must have been writhed and convulsed with ineffable horror *then*!

"You refuse to swear?" said the Bulldog, still in that same deep moody tone which was in itself ominous of murder.

"O heaven, receive my soul," I cried, "when it goes hence! Shower down thy blessings upon those whom I shall leave behind! Father of all mercies, desert not my brothers and sisters, but throw thine all-protecting shield over them!"

"You refuse, I say?" spoke the Bulldog, in a louder, sterner voice: and at the same time he and Sawbridge advanced a pace towards where I was kneeling.

I gave them no answer: I took no notice of them—though but too painfully aware that they were thus approaching me: but I continued praying with a wild enthusiasm mingled with ineffable anguish.

"Then it's no use," growled the Bulldog; "and so let it be done. We should have done it long ago."

At that instant I sprang up, frantically exclaiming, "No monsters, you shall not murder me without a desperate struggle on my part!"—and suddenly inspired with the preterhuman energy and strength of goading desperation, I snatched up the chair, wielding it as a weapon of defence. Sawbridge threw himself towards me, and with one violent jerk tore the chair from my hand: while the Bulldog, holding his pistol by the barrel, raised it with a terrible imprecation to strike me down. A wild shriek thrilled from my lips: I saw the blow descending—I darted aside—at the same instant the door burst open—and three or four of the coast-guard rushed in with their drawn cutlasses in their hands. I flew to the door, now wide open—and was received in the arms of the Gipsy Queen, who appeared upon the threshold. Overcome with the terrible excitement through which I had passed, as well as by the sense of such sudden and providential relief, I swooned away.

CHAPTER CVL

COMMENCEMENT OF THE GIPSY QUEEN'S
VENGEANCE.

WHEN I returned to consciousness, I found myself in the open air, lying upon the beach, but half-supported in the arms of Barbauld Azetha, who had loosened my dress and done all she could to restore me. It seemed like waking out of a hideous dream; and upwards of a minute elapsed ere I could so far collect my thoughts as to have a clear perception of all the horrors I had gone through. Then strong shudderings, spasmodic and convulsive, seized upon me; and the Gipsy Queen besought me in the kindest—I might even say the most endearing terms, to compose my feelings. She assured me that I was safe, and that the two ruffians were in the custody of the preventive men.

The conviction that I was thus beyond their power produced a most salutary effect upon me; and sitting up by the Gipsy Queen's side on the beach, I poured forth my gratitude for the kindness I was receiving at her hands. Glancing back—not without a shuddering sensation—towards the hut where the dreadful scene had taken place, I saw several of the inhabitants of the little hamlet just outside the doorway, and evidently peeping in with earnest curiosity: for the door was still standing open, and the light in the room thus made objects visible. I also heard many voices talking in different parts of the hamlet; and presently beheld four or five men, evidently in the custody of a couple of officers of the preventive service, conducted to the front of the hut, whence the light streamed forth on the naked cutlasses of the coast-guard. One of these officers now descended to the spot where I was seated with the Gipsy Queen; and feeling myself much stronger—indeed nearly recovered—I rose to my feet.

"Do you think, Miss Price," asked the revenue officer, "that you could recognize the fellows who carried you off? for I have got the most suspicious of the men of the hamlet all assembled up here."

I accompanied the preventive man and the Gipsy Queen to the front of the hut; and the glance that I flung through the window showed me the Bulldog and Sawbridge strongly bound in the custody of a couple of officers, who stood over them with drawn swords. There was a subdued dogged ferocity in the looks of the two ruffians: but it struck me that Sawbridge seemed a trifle more desponding and crestfallen than his companion.

"Now, you fellows, face the window, so that the light may fall on your faces;"—and as one of the officers thus spoke, he compelled the fishermen to do as he bade them,—immediately afterwards observing to me, "I don't suppose you would like to go inside again, in order to pass these people in review before the candle?"

"No," said I, quickly recoiling in horror from the bare idea of finding myself any more in the immediate presence of the two murderers. I accordingly proceeded to examine the countenances of some dozen men who had been brought from different points of the hamlet to this spot, and who were in the custody of about six preventive men, in addition to the two that were keeping guard over

Sawbridge and the Bulldog. The very first man I looked at, struck me as being one of those who had carried me off: but as I glanced along the rank, there seemed to be such a strong likeness prevailing throughout the whole array of countenances, that I felt convinced I must give no hasty decision. They all bore that same half-savage, sullen, brutal, cold-blooded doggedness of look which I had noticed on the part of the men in the boat; and as my feelings at the time of my capture were of too horrible and confused a nature to permit me to obtain a very accurate impress of the specific casts of features, I now found myself completely puzzled and bewildered how to fix upon the perpetrators of my abduction. I would not for worlds stand the risk of making a false accusation; and therefore I was compelled to confess to the officers the impossibility which I experienced to identify the guilty persons.

"In that case," said the one who was in command, "there is no use in keeping them assembled here any longer;"—then, most likely fearing that an attempt might be made to rescue the Bulldog and Sawbridge, he observed, "Now disperse, all of you, to your habitations—and don't venture to stir out until we have left the place. Come, be off—and don't stand loitering here."

But still the fishermen lingered,—and I observed that they were exchanging rapid and sinister looks amongst themselves. The Gipsy Queen caught me by the arm, saying, "Mary, you must speed homeward. I will accompany you."

"Now then, disperse, I say!" ejaculated the officer: "for you know my men are not to be trifled with; and neither our cutlasses nor pistols will be spared if you dare move a hand against us."

Never shall I forget the simultaneousness of the savage cries which burst forth, as if with one accord, from the assembled fishermen. This blending of voices in one wild ferocious yell took place at the moment that I was turning away with Barbauld Azetha: and she exclaimed with rapid utterance, "Come, Mary, I say: there will be an attempt at rescue!"

At the same instant the conflict began. Instinctively I flung a glance behind me, and saw that the fishermen had precipitated themselves upon the coast-guard; and that quick as lightning a fearful struggle had commenced. Pistol-shots were fired—then the light was extinguished within the hut—and through the gloom of night I beheld the dark shapes of the combatants, agitating, battling, and conflicting in fiercest strife; while the voices of the officers levelling forth menaces, mingled with the yells of the fishermen who were grappling with them, and the screams of the women who were hastening to the scene of the affray. Not another instant did I tarry—but sped away with the Gipsy Queen as if it were a race for life or death; because I knew that if the two murderers were released, and should they overtake us, my doom would be sealed.

In a few minutes we were so far away from the spot that the sounds of the conflict ceased to reach our ears: but relaxing not our pace, we pressed onward, without stopping once until we reached the nearest buildings of the town. Then, breathless and exhausted, I sank down upon a bench which stood upon the beach, and was compelled to rest there for two or three minutes. The Gipsy Queen was

neither out of breath nor fatigued: she sat down quietly by my side, congratulating me on the escape I had experienced. While we were still there, three or four more of the coast-guard passed along; and Barbauld bade them speed to Hampton to assist their comrades, whom she had left in deadly strife with the fishermen. The men hurried in that direction,—while the Gipsy Queen and I continued our way towards the house where I dwelt.

"Tell me," I said, "how all this happened."

"A few words will explain it," replied Barbauld. "I was passing near the post-office about half-past nine o'clock, when I heard your name mentioned; and immediately afterwards three men and a woman passed me rapidly by, and disappeared from my view in the darkness. But the sounds of their footsteps had ceased so suddenly that I felt assured they had not gone away from the spot—but had halted, probably to conceal themselves somewhere near. I stood up against one of the houses, so as to remain concealed in the depth of the shade; and almost immediately afterwards I heard the woman's voice say, '*It is she!*' The next instant it appeared to me as if there was a rush of footsteps down the beach: but as there was no shriek—no cry of alarm, I was at a loss what to think or what to do. Rushing forth from my place of concealment, I strained my eyes to penetrate the darkness, and beheld a boat push off from the shore. Then, by the glimmering that was on the water, methought that I could distinguish a female form amongst those in the boat. That some treachery had been accomplished, I felt afraid; and that if so, you were its victim, I was persuaded, in consequence of your name having been mentioned. I candidly confess that for the first time I was bewildered how to act: the boat was gliding away—it was already but a speck upon the water—in a few moments more it disappeared from my view, engulfed as it were in the darkness of night. While I was thus standing irresolute, I heard footsteps approaching; and hastening to meet whomsoever the persons might be, in order to raise an alarm, I found it was a party of four coast-guards. To them I at once communicated what I had seen.—'Depend upon it,' ejaculated one, 'this is some rascality of those fellows at Hampton; and that's the reason they put off in a boat just now.'—The coast-guard accordingly decided on repairing to Hampton at once; but not considering themselves strong enough, they were compelled to send farther on and procure a reinforcement, another party being out at the same time. Thus nearly half-an-hour was lost, during which I experienced the acutest suspense and the liveliest misgivings. There was however no help for it; and thus I was forced to tarry—for I knew that it was useless for me to proceed to the village alone, as singled-handed I could do nothing for you. At length the reinforcement arrived; and I accompanied the united parties. On the way to Hampton, I learnt that one of the coast-guard had seen a boat with five men put off thence soon after eight o'clock that evening; and as the same occurrence had taken place for the three or four evenings previously, suspicions had been entertained that some mischief was intended: but it was presumed to be a smuggling concern. It is clear, therefore, Mary, that you have been watched for several nights running—most probably in the hope that for some

purpose or other you might chance to leave the house. With regard to the incidents of this particular evening, I need say no more. It was but too evident that we arrived just in time to save you from those murderous villains. You may conceive my surprise when on glancing through the window, I recognized them both just at the very instant one snatched the chair from your hand and the other was about to deal you a death-blow."

"Then it is to you, my dear friend," I said, "that my chief gratitude is due: it is you who were the means of saving me! I suspected as much the instant I beheld you. The thought flashed to my mind that it was you whom heaven had made the instrument of my deliverance. Oh! how can I ever repay you for what you have done?"

"Say no more upon the subject, dear Mary," replied the Gipsy Queen, warmly pressing my hands; for I had grasped her's as I spoke. "Did not I tell you to-day upon the cliffs that I liked you—that I loved you?—and indeed I do, Mary, more than ever, since I have been enabled to save your life. But spare me one moment ere you enter the house, —to tell me what those villains had you carried off for? Was it for the mere gratification of their vengeance?"

In a few hurried words I explained to the Gipsy Queen the particulars of that terrible interview between myself and the two murderers; and when she learnt that I had preferred death to the alternative of taking an oath which I could not keep, she expressed herself in terms of enthusiastic admiration of my conduct. I now bade her farewell, and knocked at the house-door. It was midnight, —and every one in the dwelling was sitting up (Lady Talbot and the children excepted) in terrible alarm at my protracted absence. Great and unfeigned was the joy with which my return was welcomed; and when I related all that I had gone through, I found myself the object of universal sympathy and condolence. Even Sir Richard Talbot himself, who was seldom moved or excited by anything, shook me warmly by the hand, congratulating me on my almost miraculous escape. The reader may be assured that I did not say for what object I was visiting the post-office at the time when the outrage took place; nor did I state that it was the Gipsy Queen to whom I owed my deliverance —but merely alluded to her as a female whom I had previously met and known in London.

Sarah, notwithstanding her indisposition, had persisted in sitting up for me; and I learnt that she had even been so anxious on my account as to go out to look for me, leaving Fanny in charge of the children. Alas! I was struck with the misgiving that it was more to have an opportunity of inquiring at the post-office for her expected letter, that my sister had thus gone forth: for Fanny found an opportunity of whispering to me that she had given Sarah some excuse for having been herself unable to make that inquiry. Sarah however embraced me with so much apparent joy and affection, and appeared so deeply concerned when she listened to the narrative of all I had gone through, that I for a moment blamed myself for attributing any selfishness to her.

The household separated for the night to their respective apartments; and although sleep fell upon my eyes the moment I entered my couch, yet I was

haunted by terrible dreams, in which the occurrences at the hamlet were enacted all over again, and, if possible, with additional horrors. When I awoke in the morning I took the first opportunity of directing Fanny, unheard by my sister, to slip out to the post-office; and when she returned it was with the information that Sarah had knocked there at the door, on the previous night, after the office was shut up, requesting as a particular favour that if there were any letter for her it might be given—a demand that was acceded to, it being known that she was in Lady Talbot's service. It appeared there *was* a letter, and that she received it accordingly. Thus the fear which I had entertained was fully confirmed, to the effect that it was not altogether on my account that Sarah, despite her indisposition, had persisted in going forth in the night-air and at such a late hour. I therefore saw the necessity of maintaining as strict a watch as ever over the self-willed girl's movements and proceedings.

The intelligence of what took place after I fled with the Gipsy Queen from Hampton on the preceding night, soon reached my ears. It was as Barbauld Azetha had foreseen: a rescue was successfully accomplished! None of the coast-guard were killed, though some of them were seriously injured: for it appeared that the fishermen being double their number, and closing with them so suddenly, had succeeded in overpowering them—that the women of the hamlet, hastening to the succour of the men, had proved no mean auxiliary—and the result was that the Bulldog and Sawbridge were enabled to accomplish their escape. Several of the fishermen had been severely wounded with the pistols and cutlasses of the officers ere they succeeded in wresting the weapons from their grasp: and one woman had received a random shot which killed her on the spot. Such was the issue of the conflict at Hampton; and it appeared that a force was proceeding thither, accompanied by a magistrate, to investigate the affair upon the spot. I may as well observe here, that several of the ringleaders were identified by the coast-guard, arrested, and sent for trial at the Quarter Sessions, when they were convicted and sentenced to different periods of imprisonment.

In a little place like Herne Bay, my adventure produced the utmost sensation, and caused my name to be mentioned in every house. It was thus known who I was; for there were very few people in the kingdom who had not heard of my conduct at Derby in respect to the affair of Leonard Percival. I thus found myself the object of universal attention when I went out to walk; and as I never courted such popularity, but indeed shrank from it, I stirred abroad as little as possible until the excitement had begun to subside. As for walking to any distance into the country, I dared not: I felt that so long as those two murderous villains, the Bulldog and Sawbridge, were at large on the face of the earth, I should never be safe again, except under circumstances of great precaution.

Ten days elapsed after the incidents of that tremendous night; but I had scarcely recovered from the shock that I had received, and my dreams still continued to be haunted with images of horror. But what was my sister meditating? what meant that clandestine correspondence with Edgar

Selden? I could no more conceive than I could at the time when I first became aware of it. I continued to watch her closely: but she did nothing to strengthen my suspicions. Fanny was still in my interest; and no more letters passed through her hands. Had Sarah no sinister intent? was her breach of faith towards me merely confined to that clandestine correspondence? But if so, why this secret letter-writing? I was bewildered and afflicted: yet I suffered her not to perceive what I thought, what I felt, or what I feared.

During the ten days which thus elapsed, I had not again encountered the Gipsy Queen. Indeed, I had gone out as little as possible, and only when Sarah wished to do so; and then we confined our rambles principally to the beach. One morning we were walking near the bathing establishment with the three children, when the scene which I am about to relate took place. I must observe that there were a great number of visitors at this time at Herne Bay; and it was just the hour—between eleven and twelve in the forenoon—when the bathing was going on. A considerable number of ladies and gentlemen were lounging about in the vicinage of the baths and machines,—either awaiting their turns, or else whiling away the time in discourse. Presently I beheld Sir Aubrey Clavering and Lady Davenant approaching arm-in-arm; and not choosing to meet them—as indeed I sedulously avoided to do whenever I saw them—I proposed to Sarah to sit down upon the beach and let the children play about. We did so; and thus our backs were turned towards the pathway along which the baronet and her ladyship were advancing.

All of a sudden I heard a loud voice exclaim, "Villain, scoundrel!"—and these ejaculations were instantaneously followed by several quick blows as if with a horsewhip.

I glanced round, and at once perceived a tall man severely chastising Sir Aubrey Clavering, who was struggling with him. Lady Davenant, furious with rage, caught hold of the arm which thus potently wielded the whip: but the individual hurled her away with such force that she staggered against the building containing the baths. An immense excitement prevailed amongst all the spectators; some of the ladies were screaming, and some of the gentlemen were rushing forward to interfere;—but before any assistance could be rendered to Sir Aubrey, his opponent, far more powerful than himself, had forced him down upon his knees, and then lashed him most unmercifully. I now caught a glimpse of the chastiser's countenance; and at once recognized the well-bearded face of Captain Tollemache.

At that moment I observed the Gipsy Queen glide round the building—walk quickly up to Lady Davenant—throw back her veil—and say something that made her ladyship become crimson with indignation. Then Barbauld Azetha walked slowly away: but I noticed that ere she lowered her veil again, she flung towards me a rapid and significant glance which I alone perceived; and I at once comprehended that the scene I have just described was a portion of her vengeance. That scene was, up to this point, but the work of about a minute—an interval quite long enough, however, for Captain Tollemache to inflict so cruel a chastisement with his great heavy horsewhip upon Sir Aubrey Cla-



vering, that when some gentlemen forcibly separated them, the baronet could scarcely drag himself, half fainting and exhausted as he was, to the nearest bench, on which he sank gasping for breath—his countenance livid—his lips ashy white.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Captain Tollemache, speaking in a loud tone, and addressing those who had interfered, "perhaps you have only done what I should under similar circumstances. But no chastisement could be too great for that unprincipled scoundrel. Would that it were not a coward's deed to raise one's hand against a woman—or I would punish that vile creature likewise!"

And then Captain Tollemache proceeded to vociferate a bitter tirade against them both,—heaping the most pungent, stinging, goading insults upon their heads—revealing all the infamy of Gertrude's conduct towards her sister Selina—and loading her in fact with such overwhelming invectives—flinging at her such withering sarcasms—that all her brazen

hardihood forsook her, the courage of the strong-minded woman melted away, and she sank down senseless on the path.

I could not endure any more of that scene, but hurried the children away; and although Sarah exclaimed, "Oh, let us stop and see the end of it—it is so amusing!"—I would not listen to her, and she was compelled to follow. The bitter denunciations and the withering revelations which Captain Tollemache poured forth in a loud and continuous torrent of words, had already comprised epithets and facts somewhat offensive to the ear of modesty, and unfit for a young girl like Sarah to listen to; and I was heartily sorry that we had been spectators of the scene. But just as we were hurrying away, I heard Sir Aubrey Clavering exclaim, "You shall give me satisfaction for this, Captain Tollemache!"

Ah! there was to be a duel then? and this would prove another phase in Barbauld Azetha's vengeance! She had evidently made Captain

Tollemache her instrument; and by the way he had commenced, it was likewise plainly apparent that she had chosen one who would not do her work by halves. The exposure was terrible—the chastisement itself had been tremendous: but far more agonizing than even the blows of the heavy horse-whip upon Sir Aubrey Clavering's person, must have been the withering denunciations which Captain Tollemache had levelled against Lady Davenant. I certainly felt distressed at the whole transaction—not but that both the victims of this fierce vengeance were as little deserving of sympathy as any two persons of my acquaintance in the world.

Not having been very well since the terrible night of my adventures at Hampton, I suppose that I was more easily agitated and excited by this scene on the beach than I should otherwise have been: or at least I felt its effects more. To use a common but expressive phrase, it completely upset me; and when the evening came, I proposed to Sarah that we should retire to rest earlier than usual. It was my habit to lock the outer door of the chambers used as the nursery, and to secrete the key under my pillow: therefore I could not go to bed myself until Sarah was prepared, in case anything should be wanted from down stairs. Fanny, hearing that I was unwell, went and fetched me up some Port-wine negus; for though it was the middle of summer, I felt cold shiverings all over me. As a general rule I very rarely touched any alcoholic beverage at all,—drinking even water instead of malt-liquor with my dinner: but I really fancied this negus on the present occasion. Sarah suggested that I should hasten into bed and drink it there, as it would encourage perspiration and do me more good. I accordingly passed into the chamber where I slept with one of the children; and when I was in bed, Sarah brought the negus to me herself. I thanked my sister for this kindness on her part, and drank about half the contents of the tumbler. She stooped over—kissed me—and retired into the other room where she slept with the two younger girls.

When I awoke in the morning my first sensation was that of a severe headache, and an oppressive drowsy heavy feeling which I could not immediately shake off. I also had a dry and disagreeable taste in my mouth, which I attributed to the beverage I had taken over night, being so much unaccustomed to it. I had not however been awake many minutes, when the door of communication between the two chambers opened, and one of the children who slept with my sister, came in, saying, “Mary, where is Sarah?”

With a pang shooting through my brain and a kind of convulsive start, I thrust my hand under the pillow—but the key was gone. What could it mean? Perhaps I had slept later than usual—and I looked at my watch, which, though I did not wear it out of doors, I was accustomed to put by my bedside at night. It was only seven o'clock—earlier than Fanny was wont to come up to prepare the breakfast. Springing out of bed, I at once looked in the cupboard where Sarah kept her things. Her best bonnet and a very handsome shawl that she possessed, together with all the remainder of her Sunday apparel, were missing.

Alas! my sister Sarah had fled.

CHAPTER CVII.

PURSUIT.

FOR the first few moments the shock occasioned by this discovery, was so overwhelming that I sank upon a chair in blank dismay. The children gathered around me: for although I did not weep, they saw by my looks that something was terribly wrong—and in their own little way they said and did all they could to console me. While I was in this state, Fanny entered the room; and not immediately missing Sarah, she could not comprehend what ailed me: but one of the children asking her where Sarah was, the truth flashed to the maid's comprehension. I now began to recover my self-possession: with difficulty did I keep down my tears—but I felt that it was a moment for energetic action, and not for abandoning myself to weakness. I dressed myself hastily: and when my toilet was finished, I began searching Sarah's boxes to see if I could find any letters that might afford me a trace as to whither she had gone.

Yes—I discovered two letters. One dated about eighteen days back, and from Edgar Selden of course: it congratulated her on having found the means of defeating my vigilance and of corresponding with him secretly. It conjured her to fly to him so soon as she should find an opportunity, and informed her that if she wished, he would come privately into the neighbourhood and wait in some secluded retreat until she could join him. It alluded jocularly and sarcastically to the conditions I had imposed upon him; and contained, amongst others, this passage:—“Do you, remember, dearest Sarah, that day when your prudish sister described to me her stipulations? do you recollect that when in the lane skirting the park, you told me that Mary wanted to speak to me? and you added hurriedly, ‘*Agree to anything she proposes: it will throw her off her guard; but don't appear to yield too willingly, or she will suspect.*’—Well dearest Sarah, did I not follow your advice? How I was laughing in my sleeve the whole time your sister was so solemnly and seriously laying down the law! But I knew the while that your love was as impatient as mine, and the idea of two years' or eighteen months' delay was preposterous. You must write to me again, dearest Sarah; and pray be cautious, for your sister is amazingly keen.”

Ah, ungrateful Sarah! how it cut me to my soul to think that she should thus have allowed a mere stranger to write to her in such unfeeling terms relative to myself. But I had little time for reflection: I was all hurry and excitement. And what said the second letter? It was dated eleven or twelve days back, and was therefore no doubt the one which she herself had fetched from the post-office. It enjoined her to lose no time in carrying her project into execution; and it contained this passage:—“You say, dearest Sarah, that Mary still watches you so closely that you cannot easily escape her, and that it is absolutely necessary you should have several hours' start, lest she should discover your flight and have time to overtake you ere you succeed in joining me. You say likewise that she invariably locks the door at night, places the key under the pillow, and sleeps so light that the mere:

sound would awake her. The little phial I enclose you, contains a soporific. If you could administer it in any dark-coloured liquid—such as beer for instance, or Port-wine—it would have the effect of making her sleep sound enough, and would not hurt her. Surely such an opportunity must occur within the next few days? You say you think it best that I should remain in London till you can join me there, because if I were to steal down into the neighbourhood I might be seen by some of the servants. You tell me that as for my coming to Herne Bay it would be out of the question—that I could not possibly conceal myself there—and that as for sojourning at Canterbury, it would be almost as dangerous, because some of the servants are constantly going over to that city to purchase things which cannot be obtained at Herne Bay. Well then, dear Sarah, under all circumstances I will follow your advice, and remain in London till you join me. You remember what I said in my former letter? If you can escape from the house at a reasonable hour in the night—say before twelve o'clock—go straight to some person who hires out vehicles; hesitate not to knock him up if in bed—offer to pay him liberally for a carriage or fly to take you to Canterbury—and he will not refuse. Then post up to London straight. You have ample funds: but in case you should in any way have trenched upon what I sent you in my former letter, I enclose you another note for twenty pounds. It is only your own money, dearest Sarah, that I am sending you: for all I have is as much your's as mine."

Such was my excitement—such the hurry of my brain—such the whirl of my thoughts, that it took me but little time to read the letters from which I give the above extracts. Oh! what duplicity on the one hand and treachery on the other were thus developed to my knowledge,—consummate duplicity on the part of Sarah, and the foulest treachery on that of Edgar Selden! And I, who at one moment had felt inclined to think less harshly of that young man than at first! No wonder was it that I had slept so soundly the past night,—no wonder that I had awakened with a pain in my head and a disagreeable taste in my mouth! Hypocritical Sarah! she had drugged the wine;—and when she had stooped over to kiss me, must she not have experienced a pang at the deceit she was practising? But my mind was made up. I would fly in pursuit. Giving Fanny directions to pack me up a few things in the smallest of my boxes, I descended to Lady Talbot's chamber; for I knew that Sir Richard, who was a very early riser, would by this time have gone out for his morning's walk before breakfast. Her ladyship was still in bed; and she was surprised at so unusual a thing as a visit from me at such an hour. I speedily explained to her what had happened; and as a proof that her nephew had seduced my sister away, I showed her the letters which I had found. She was far more annoyed than I expected she would be, and likewise demonstrated greater sympathy towards myself than I had fancied her capable of showing. She did not attempt to dissuade me from my resolve to hasten up to London in the hope of rescuing my sister from her nephew ere it was too late. She asked me if I had sufficient funds, placing her purse at my disposal: but I had ample resources of my own, and therefore required not pecuniary succour. She

wished me good bye,—telling me that whatever might be the result it need not make any difference with respect to myself in the family, and that she hoped I should return as speedily as possible. At the same time she gave me to understand, in a delicate way, that she could not of course again receive my sister into the house.

I thought it by no means likely that I should ever return to her ladyship's service again; and as I did not choose to leave her with any false impression upon the subject, I told her so candidly at once.

"If, my lady," I said, "I am fortunate enough to recover my sister, it will be my duty to keep her with me, perhaps for some years to come, in order to exercise a strict vigilance over her conduct. But if, on the other hand, I should be unfortunate enough to fail, I could not return into a household where every glance thrown upon me would seem to stigmatize me as the sister of a young girl who had disgraced herself so fatally: for that Mr. Selden entertains the slightest notion of making her his wife, I am not foolish enough to imagine."

"Dear me," said Lady Talbot, "this decision on your part is very annoying, just as you had got everything so comfortable, and I was spared so much trouble. You must think better of it, Mary."

"I cannot, my lady," I replied; "at the same time that I thank you for the confidence you place in me. I must ask permission to leave my principal effects here, until I write to Fanny and tell her whither I wish them forwarded."

Lady Talbot gave her assent; and having paid me whatsoever was due, allowed me to take leave of her—for she saw that I was in a hurry to depart. I ascended to the nursery, and embraced the children, who were much grieved at parting from me. I likewise bade farewell to Fanny, and sped away from the house, one of the men-servants following with my box. I repaired at once to a place where vehicles were let out; for there was no public conveyance to Canterbury at so early an hour. While the chaise that I ordered was being gotten in readiness, I inquired if a young person had obtained a vehicle from the same place during the past night, and was at once informed that such was the case, and that it was soon after eleven. Alas, I was struck with a deeper misgiving than I had previously entertained: for Sarah had thus acquired a good ten hours' start of me, it being now close on nine o'clock. Sad and sorrowful indeed were my meditations, as I journeyed on to Canterbury; and though the vehicle went in reality fast enough, yet to me, impatient as I was, it appeared to creep along at a sluggish pace. In about an hour Canterbury was reached: I ordered a post-chaise—and was soon being whirled along the road to London. I will not fatigue the reader by dwelling on the harrowing nature of my thoughts during this journey to the metropolis: they were indeed afflicting enough.

The fifty-six miles from Canterbury to London were accomplished in five hours; and it was therefore between three and four o'clock when I entered London. I knew that Mr. Selden resided at No. —, Conduit Street, Hanover Square; and thither did I order the postilion to drive. When the chaise stopped at the house, my heart beat with such strong vibrations that they were perfectly audible. I alighted and knocked at the door. A respectable-looking woman, of middle age, answered the summons.

"Is Mr. Selden within?" I inquired.

"No, Miss," she replied: and she looked very hard at me.

"Pray allow me to speak to you," I immediately observed.

"With pleasure:"—and she conducted me to a parlour on the ground floor: then closing the door, she again looked at me with earnestness and curiosity.

"Has a young person been here within the last few hours—a young person resembling me—for I see that you suspect it is my sister concerning whom I am inquiring?"

"Yes—at about seven o'clock this morning."

"And they are gone?" I ejaculated: gone away together? Tell me the truth—for heaven's sake do not deceive me!"

"My dear Miss," answered the female, "I have not the slightest inclination to deceive you, but would render you any service in my power. I see that there is something wrong. Indeed, I more than half suspected it when that young lady arrived in a post-chaise this morning. Your sister—Ah! I pity you!"—and she spoke in a sympathizing manner.

"How long did she stay?—do you know whither they are gone? Oh, tell me everything!" I exclaimed in an agony of suspense.

"The young lady," she answered, "took breakfast with Mr. Selden. Then he called me up—for I must tell you that I am the landlady of this house, and Mr. Selden merely occupied apartments here——"

"Well, he called you up?"

"Yes—to resign possession of the apartments. He said that he was going elsewhere. He paid his various bills: and of course I had nothing to say. His preparations were soon made—a hackney-coach was sent for—and he and the young lady went away together."

"Ah! a hackney-coach was sent for? Who fetched it?"

"Mr. Selden's man-servant. But of course he got it from the nearest stand, which is up the street; and it would not be difficult to find out which one it was, and where it conveyed them to. Now, my dear Miss, as perhaps I know London better than you do—and I see that you are very much distressed—I will go and make the inquiry for you. Remain here till I come back. I shall not be five minutes."

I thanked the good woman most heartily for her kindness, and begged that I might be permitted to leave my box in her charge—to which she assented. I then dismissed the post-chaise, and remained in a feverish state of anxiety till she returned. She soon re-appeared, having discovered the driver of the particular hackney-coach in question; and had ascertained from him that he had driven the gentleman and the lady with the man-servant, to *Hatchett's Hotel* in Piccadilly. The landlady, whose name I may here state was Mrs. Chaplin, offered to accompany me thither—a proposal that I thankfully accepted. The hotel was at no great distance; and so we repaired thither on foot. A waiter, to whom we addressed our inquiries, recollected perfectly well a gentleman and lady, attended by a man-servant, answering the description given, having come to the hotel at about nine o'clock in the morn-

ing: but they had almost immediately departed by one of the numerous coaches starting from that establishment. We now prosecuted our inquiries in the coach-office: and there, after some little difficulty, we succeeded in ascertaining that the objects of our search had booked themselves for Birmingham. I asked when the next coach would leave for Birmingham, and was informed that there would be one at eight o'clock in the evening. I could not dream of posting any more—as that expensive mode of travelling would speedily exhaust all my funds: and I stepped aside to deliberate with Mrs. Chaplin what course I ought to pursue. She was a shrewd woman: and after a little reflection, she said, "Birmingham, Miss Price,"—for I had told her my name,—"is on the way to the north; and if they are journeying to the north, it is probable that they are going to *Gretna Green*."

At these words the animation of joyful hope appeared upon my countenance: for I knew that if they were really about to visit that world-renowned spot, it must be for the purpose of marriage; and though it was not the kind of ceremony which would be preferred by persons of delicate minds and strict propriety of conduct, yet still it *was* marriage to all intents and purposes. The thought occurred to me that after all,—as I had before reflected at Talbot Abbey,—it was possible that Sarah's pride would lead her to insist upon the performance of the marriage-ceremony, and thus save her from disgrace and ruin. But still I felt that it was my duty to follow up the pursuit, until I should obtain the certainty of what was occurring—or as long as my resources should enable me to do so. I accordingly secured a place for the inside of the coach that was to leave *Hatchett's Hotel* for Birmingham at eight o'clock that evening; and it being now scarcely five, I returned with Mrs. Chaplin to her house.

Not a morsel of food had as yet passed my lips this day, and when I set down to tea with her, I could eat but little—for I was faint, ill, and well nigh exhausted. I besought her to give me such insight as she was enabled to afford, into the character of Mr. Selden. She said that he had only taken her apartments about six months back, and that for more than half that time he had been absent—that while he was at her house he had done as most other young men of his age, position, and circumstances, were accustomed to do—keeping late hours and not conducting himself in a very regular manner. At the same time, she had no special complaint to make against him: he had acted honourably so far as money transactions went—but she did not know enough of him to say whether he was one who would act equally well in affairs of love.

"Speaking candidly," she added, "I did not at first think that a young man like him *could* mean honourably toward a young female who thus voluntarily threw herself under his protection: but the circumstance of their having gone northward, has certainly inspired me with the hope and the belief that my first impression may prove unfounded."

I endeavoured to cheer my spirits with the same hope, and to a certain extent succeeded in doing so: but still it was more conjecture—and there was a large amount of painful uncertainty and suspense left in my soul.

When the time came to take my departure, Mrs.

Chaplin insisted upon seeing me as far as the coach-office. On arriving there—a porter carrying my box—I delicately endeavoured to force upon her some remuneration for the trouble she had taken: but she would not listen to such a thing; and at once turning the conversation, begged me not to fail in letting her know the result of my journey. I promised her that I would write; and assured her also that when I again visited London, I should not forget to call and personally renew my grateful thanks for the kind and motherly conduct I had experienced at her hands. We then parted; and taking my place in the coach, I was soon beyond the outskirts of the “multitudinous metropolis.”

CHAPTER CVIII.

GRETNNA-GREEN.

It was at nine o'clock in the morning that the coach entered the great manufacturing town of Birmingham; and on alighting at the office, I at once instituted inquiries concerning those of whom I was in search. Fortunately these were satisfactorily answered; and from the information I received, there could be no doubt that Edgar Selden and my sister had departed only one hour previously by the morning-coach bound for Carlisle. I asked when there would be another coach leaving for the same city, and was told in half-an-hour. The distance from Birmingham to Carlisle was two hundred miles. On inquiring the fare, and then examining the state of my purse, I found that if I took an inside-place, my means would be exhausted to within a few shillings: but then I had my watch and jewellery with me, and could raise a fresh supply. Two hundred miles! I could not possibly travel outside the coach; for I was much fatigued and exhausted with the long journeys already accomplished—but still more so with mental anxiety. I therefore resolved to secure the one inside-place still remaining free in the coach which was about to start; and there was just a sufficient interval of time to perform my ablutions and obtain some refreshment at the inn next door to the booking-office. I took my seat in the coach; and the equipage rolled out of Birmingham on its long journey to Carlisle.

My three companions inside the stage consisted of a gentleman of about thirty, a young lady of not more than eighteen, and a woman of about five-and-twenty, who was evidently the lady's dependant. The gentleman was remarkably handsome, but was dressed rather in a coxcombical and dandified style than with tasteful gentility. The young lady was by no means good-looking: she was short, thin, very pale—and to speak in plain terms, had a pug nose. The redeeming qualities of her personal appearance were her hair, her eyes, and her teeth, all of which were good. Indeed I have seldom seen such a rich profusion of dark brown tresses as those which fell in heavy clusters from beneath the straw bonnet which she wore. She was dressed plainly, but well—good taste pervading her whole toilet. The maid was a pert-looking woman, with an impudent stare, and no small idea of her own importance. For some time after the coach started she kept gazing at me in a very rude manner; and once or twice I caught her young mistress slightly frowning at her,

and giving a significant look as much as to enjoin her not to regard me so fixedly. At length the maid-servant dozed off to sleep in the corner of the coach; and I was thus relieved from a staring process which had begun to annoy me considerably.

The gentleman and lady conversed together in low whispers: but every now and then they dropped a word audible enough to my ears—and I thus gathered that her Christian name was Melissa, and his Walter. He showed her the most assiduous attentions, which he endeavoured to render as delicate and as endearing as possible: but the more I saw of him, the deeper became my conviction that he was not a gentleman by birth or breeding. That he studied well the manners of gentility, was evident enough; and these very efforts proved that he was conscious of his own defects and did his best to remedy or conceal them. That the young lady was profoundly infatuated with him, soon became apparent, and that they were either lovers or else had only been very recently married, I soon conjectured. As the day wore on, however, and I saw more of them, I came to the conclusion that they were not yet man and wife, but were doubtless soon to become so. From something they said I ascertained that they had travelled the whole of the preceding night; and indeed the young lady, as well as the servant-maid, appeared much fatigued. It also struck me that there was occasionally a certain trepidation and anxiety on the part of all three; and once, when a post-chaise overtook the coach and passed it, proceeding in the same direction but at a quicker rate, their uneasiness was too plainly visible to be subdued, much less concealed. They all three looked with intense anxiety at the equipage as it swept past; and the moment it disappeared, the gentleman and lady exchanged looks expressive of a relief mutually and profoundly felt. Then they glanced at me, as if to observe whether I noticed their emotions; and though I could not help doing so, yet I gave no outward evidence that such was the case. Indeed, if I did remark all these little circumstances in respect to them, it was because they were forced upon my observation rather than pryed into by any curiosity on my side: for I had quite sufficient to occupy my own thoughts without troubling myself with the affairs of others.

Both the gentleman and lady seemed inclined to treat me with the courtesy which travellers sometimes exhibit towards one another. They had with them a basket containing sandwiches, wine, and other refreshments; and when they partook of them, they offered some to me. I however declined, with thanks; but the little incident served as an excuse for the gentleman to address a few questions to me—which he did.

“Are you travelling far, Miss?” he inquired.

“I am going to Carlisle,” was my answer.

“A long distance for you to travel by yourself. Pray did you come from London?”—and he looked at me rather hard, as if by my fatigued appearance he thought that such was the case.

“Yes—I came from London—and also from a considerable distance beyond it.”

“Indeed! And where might that be?”

“I have travelled from Herne Bay, in Kent,” was my response; and although I thought my questioner was rather inquisitive, yet he and his female companion had so generously pressed me to partake of

their refreshments, that I could not possibly answer uncivilly or coldly.

"And is Carlisle the end of your journey?" was the next query put.

"It depends upon certain circumstances—I cannot exactly say—but it is most probable that I shall have to proceed a little farther."

"A little farther?" he repeated: then after exchanging a quick glance with Melissa, he said, but in a hesitating manner as if he himself felt that the question was rather too pointed, "Might I ask how far that may be? Don't think me inquisitive—it is only because, as you are alone—at least to all appearances——"

"Yes—I am alone," was my answer. "I do not exactly know how far beyond Carlisle the place of my destination may possibly be: but I do not think it is many miles."

Again Walter and Melissa exchanged rapid and significant looks: but no farther questions were put to me for the time being. Indeed, the interrogatory could not well have been pursued without verging into downright rudeness: or else methought that the gentleman would fain have asked me some more questions. As I reclined back in my corner of the coach, a suspicion gradually stole into my mind that my travelling-companions were probably bound for that place which after all might be my own ultimate destination—namely, Gretna-Green. For I was resolved if I heard nothing of Selden and my sister at Carlisle, to proceed to that place of matrimonial renown. That my suspicion in respect to my companions was correct, I felt assured as the day wore on: for every time the coach was overtaken by any other equipage, there was a renewal of that anxiety which I had previously noticed on their part; and when we alighted to dine at some town through which we passed, I saw that Walter and Melissa were nervous and uneasy until the coach started again. As the dusk approached, I became very sleepy, and soon fell into a deep slumber—from which I did not awake until about midnight, when the stage stopped for half-an-hour to afford the passengers an opportunity of obtaining supper. When this meal was over and we had resumed our seats, I slept again through exhaustion, and slumbered on for several hours. We were within a few miles of Carlisle when I awoke; and I found that the maid-servant, who sat by my side, was exceedingly ill. Her mistress was endeavouring to persuade her to take some refreshments: but the woman was evidently too much indisposed to follow this advice. She experienced a nausea which made her heart heave against the bare idea of food or wine; and by the time the coach reached Carlisle, she was so seriously ill that on arriving at the hotel where the equipage stopped, it was absolutely necessary to convey her at once to bed and send for medical assistance.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning when I thus reached the capital of Cumberland. How many, many miles had I thus travelled within a very short space of time! What a distance now lay between me and Herne Bay, which I had quitted only two mornings previously! I felt so wearied that if the business on which I had come had not been of such importance, I should at once have retired to rest. But I was resolved not to be beaten almost at the last moment. The inquiries I made

at the coach-office relative to those of whom I was in pursuit, elicited nothing satisfactory: indeed it appeared that no such persons had arrived at that office by any conveyance during the past twelve hours. But there were other offices in the city where stages coming from the south put up; and guided by a porter, I sped about from place to place instituting these inquiries. All were unavailing—an hour was thus lost—and I began to think that my best course would have been to get on to Gretna-Green at once, without this delay. I accordingly returned to the hotel where my box had been left; and having hastily performed my toilet and snatched a little breakfast, I descended from the room to which I had been shown, to make inquiries relative to the means of getting on at once to Gretna-Green, which was only nine miles distant. I encountered Melissa on the landing of the first floor of the hotel. She had an anxious and almost frightened look: but the instant she beheld me, she appeared struck with a sudden thought—and her countenance expressed a feeling of relief.

"Will you permit me one word with you?" she said in a hurried manner; and entering a room close by, she beckoned me to follow her.

The incident took place so suddenly that I complied mechanically. It was a parlour into which I was thus conducted; and there I found the gentleman pacing to and fro apparently in an agitated manner.

"Now, Walter," said Melissa, "explain yourself to this young person:"—and she walked to the window, whence she gazed forth, either in anxious apprehension of beholding some unwelcome arrival, or else to avert her looks from mine while her companion was speaking to me.

"From what you said in the coach yesterday," the gentleman at once commenced, as he accosted me and spoke in a low but hurried voice, "I have reason to suspect that you are going on farther. Tell me candidly—do not think me impertinent—I will explain why I ask—is it to Gretna-Green?"

"It is," was my response: for I saw no reason to conceal the circumstance.

"Then listen!" quickly resumed the gentleman. "I and this lady are likewise about to proceed thither. A post-chaise is ordered—her own maid, as you have seen, is unable to accompany her. From natural feelings of delicacy, and through dread of what the world may hereafter say, she does not consider it prudent to go with me alone. Have you any objection to accompany us? I don't like to mention it: but if remuneration would be any object——"

"No, sir," I answered, somewhat indignantly: "I seek not to be paid for such a service. But perhaps the obligation will be mutual," I added more gently; "for I do wish to reach Gretna-Green as speedily as possible, and I could not afford to take a post-chaise for myself."

"Then you will come with us?" he said, his countenance beaming up with joy.

"I will accompany you, inasmuch as you would no doubt go thither without as well as with me. But observe—I can be no party to the marriage, which, as I presume, is about to take place. Not having the honour of knowing who you are, I should not like——"

"Enough! All we want is that we may be ac-

accompanied by some female. You can leave us on reaching the place of our destination. But of course, if you choose, we will bring you back to Carlisle again in the post-chaise: unless you yourself," he added, with a half-smile not exactly impertinent, but still not consistent with good taste,—"unless you yourself expect to meet some one there whose company you will not choose to leave?"

"You are quite mistaken, sir," I answered, "in your supposition concerning me. At the same time it is not unnatural that you should entertain it. But that you may know something more of one whom you thus propose to render the companion of your intended wife, I may inform you that I am proceeding to Gretna-Green to ascertain whether a near and dear relative has been thither:—and as I spoke I felt that my eyes became suddenly dim with tears."

"We know who you are—and that you are highly respectable," observed the gentleman. "I happened to see your name upon your box as it was being brought into the hotel. You were once in the service of Alderman Bull?"

"I was," I replied, looking at him with some little astonishment: for I did not recollect ever having seen either him or the lady at Mr. Bull's house.

"Come," he said,—"if you are really there is no need to wait another moment. Now, Miss Screwby," he exclaimed, addressing Melissa, "Miss Mary Price has agreed to accompany us."

Ah! the name of Screwby! I at once recollected it was that of the attorney, Mrs. Bull's father; but I did not know that he had another daughter, and one so young as this lady.

"Now, dearest Melissa," said Walter, in an undertone to Miss Screwby as he approached and took her hand; "everything is arranged to your satisfaction, and I sincerely hope that there need be no farther objection."

She threw a tender look upon her suitor, and then murmured a few words expressive of her gratitude to me for consenting to accompany them. The post-chaise being in readiness, we at once descended from the apartment where this little scene took place, and entered the vehicle, to which four horses were attached. No luggage was taken with us, as the tender pair were to return to Carlisle; and under any circumstances I felt that I should have to do so likewise. In a few minutes the post-chaise was dashing along at a tremendous rate, it being of course no matter of doubt on the part of the postilions as to the object for which Gretna-Green was being thus sought. Little conversation took place inside the chaise: but many anxious looks were flung forth by the tender pair from the windows in the direction of Carlisle—thus indicating that pursuit was still apprehended, and that the nearer they approached to the hymeneal fane, the greater became their alarm lest their hopes should be frustrated even upon the very threshold of triumph.

Amidst all the various thoughts that were agitating in my own mind, and notwithstanding my intense anxiety as to the probable result of my visit to Gretna, I could not help experiencing some degree of curiosity in respect to the far-famed village which I was now approaching. It is situated at a distance of nine miles from Carlisle; and for the greater part of the way the carriage-road traverses a barren moss.

From this dismal scenery the transition is both abrupt and agreeable to the picturesque site of the village of Gretna. The road ascends a gentle eminence, where the verdant fields and the groups of trees form a pleasing contrast to the dreary waste previously threaded.

At the foot of this eminence the carriage stopped for a moment; and one of the postilions, alighting from his horse, approached the window. With a respectful touch of his hat, but at the same time a certain cunning smile upon his countenance, he said, "Please, sir, where am I to drive?"

"You scarcely require to be informed," responded Walter, somewhat impatiently—while Melissa looked out of the opposite window.

"Well, sir," returned the postilion, "there's a many priests at Gretna: but the most respectable, which gentlefolks goes to, is Mr. Laing, or Elliot, or Mr. Linton of Gretna Hall. There's also Bailie at the toll-gate yonder—but he's not a tip-top chap."

"But the most respectable of all these?" exclaimed Walter quickly.

"That's Mr. Linton of the Hall," replied the postilion: and without waiting for any further orders, he remounted his horse. The equipage swept onward. A small church, picturesquely situated in the midst of trees, and surrounded by a few cottages which skirted the grave-yard, appeared on the left hand; while on the right, a gate communicated with a carriage-road leading completely over the eminence above-mentioned, and on the summit of which stood a house of far better appearance than any other in the neighbourhood. But ere I continue my narrative, I will pause a moment to introduce a brief but faithful description of Gretna-Green, borrowed from a popular novel bearing the same title:—

"Had Hymen made search throughout the whole of the Scottish Border, the Divinity could not have fixed upon a richer and more inviting sylvan scene, where to erect a nuptial temple, than at Gretna-Green. It has indeed all the natural and many of the cultivated charms of 'lovers' grove.' Upon the margin of Solway's estuary, and occupying a fine expanse of undulating soil,—planted as if by the careless and lavish hand of nature, scattered with the habitations of men dropped here and there at random, and studded with the picturesque village to preside over the landscape,—the whole might readily be taken by the classical traveller, to be a garden transported entire and unmarred from the shores of Greece, in its days of ancient renown when Philosophy and the Muses adorned that far-off land. The sight of the dwellings—fantastic and grotesque as many of them are, both viewed individually and in their groupings—enhances the ideas of the rich antiquity and the yet fresh luxuriance of the present scene. The tall chimneys to the humblest dwellings—the sharp and peaked roofs, many of them clad with thatch—the irregular gables—and the walls everywhere whitewashed, present to the passer-by tokens which one likes to contemplate; although a nearer and more prolonged examination, or patient inquiry into the interiors, might materially modify the first impressions."*

* From "Gretna Green: or All for Love" By Mrs. G. W. M. Reynolds. 1 vol., pp. 426. With 53 Wood-engravings. Price 5s. 6d.

Between the village and the carriage-way leading up to the house on the eminence, did the post-chaise stop; and Walter, thrusting his head forth from the window, looked to ascertain the reason—for he and Melissa were now more keenly sensitive than ever to the probability of danger. But the stoppage was temporary, and lasted only a minute—while a peasant, loitering near, hastened to open the gate above-mentioned. Walter tossed him a shilling from the chaise-window; and the equipage dashed up the eminence to the house on the top. It consisted of two storeys—was whitewashed—and had the blended aspects of a comfortable inn and a snug farm-house. Forth from the house-door, which was standing open, appeared a smart young woman, who curtsied, and smirked, and smiled as she assisted Melissa to alight.

"This is Miss Linton," said the postilion who had opened the chaise-door.

"Welcome to Gretna Hall," at once observed the young woman, with more curtsies and smiles: but nevertheless her manner was perfectly civil, and she seemed thoroughly well-behaved.

Walter and Melissa hurried into the habitation—while I, catching Miss Linton by the arm, drew her aside for a moment, and questioned her whether any persons answering a certain description that I gave, had very recently been to Gretna Hall? She replied in the negative, but informed me that two or three couples had been married on the previous day at other places in the village, and that possibly I might hear, by farther inquiries, of those concerning whom I sought information. I thanked her for her civility; and at that moment Walter issued from a room into which he and Melissa had been shown by a servant of the establishment. Addressing me, he asked how long I should be ere ready to return to Carlisle?

"Give me an hour," I said: "for I have inquiries to make in the village."

"Be it so," he responded. "We shan't go without you. When once we are spliced," he added in a whisper, and with more levity than I thought becoming the occasion, "it won't matter if the old boy from London does pop in upon us."

He then re-entered the room; and I hastened away into the village. Recollecting the names of those officiating individuals whom the post-boy had mentioned, I inquired of the peasant who had opened the gate, and who was still loitering there, which was the way to Mr. Elliot's?

"Come along, Miss, and I'll show you," was the response; and as I accompanied him towards the cottages surrounding the church, I soon found that I was an object of eager curiosity on the part of the inhabitants of those dwellings. I saw them whispering together, smiling amongst themselves, and exchanging significant looks; and I heard an old erone say to another gossip, "Perhaps the poor girl has come on a wild-geese chase after all, and her lover is not here?"

"May be, Miss," said the peasant, doubtless perceiving how red my cheeks became as those words caught my ears, "you're expecting some one that isn't here?"

"I hope to find certain persons whom I seek," was my response, given loud enough to be heard by the villagers who were now following in a perfect

little crowd: "but the real object of my presence here seems to be very much mistaken."

"Then maybe," said the peasant, "you're looking after the two gentlemen and two ladies that came in a post-chaise just before your arrival and have gone to old Laing's house?"

"No—I do not think that it can be the right party," was my answer.

"Well, here's Elliot's," said the peasant, stopping at the door of a low public-house, whence the fumes of whisky, mingling with those of tobacco, emanated with an almost overpowering effect. The glance which I threw into the place, showed me several persons of the lowest description, drinking in a vile tap-room; while an ill-looking person, with a very red nose and a fur cap upon his head, was dispensing liquor from behind a little bar. He was in his shirt sleeves, which were tucked up to his elbows; and from appearances it was plain enough that he was particularly indifferent as to the cleanliness of his linen. He had a sottish look, and surveyed me with a half-drunk leer as I stopped short upon the threshold.

"This young lass wants some information," said the peasant, as he entered the public-house and addressed the individual in the bar.

"This is the shop for marriages and whisky, Miss," said the man: "so pray walk in and don't be afeard. What will you take?"—and he laid his hand upon a stone-bottle as he spoke.

I entered the place—for I was determined not to recoil from anything disagreeable after the many weary miles I had travelled and all the trouble I had taken. The villagers—male and female, old and young—thronged round about the door to hear what was to take place: for it was evidently a most unusual sight for a female to pay a visit to the renowned shrine of Gretna without a companion of the male sex.

My inquiries were soon made, and Elliot gave me to understand that no persons answering my description had been to his "shop." I threw down half-a-crown by way of recompense for such attention as he had paid me, and was about to turn away, when he beckoned me with a sly look, observing, "I say, Miss, just one word in your ear."

Thinking that the previous information he had given me was false, and that he was about to tell me something more satisfactory in answer to my inquiries, I did approach him; and bending forward so as to speak in a whisper, he said, "If so be, Miss, you want a husband, I know an uncommon sma' t chap in the village as wants a wife, and if you'll let me send and fetch him, you can be spliced in a jiffy."

Amazement had nailed me to the spot just long enough to hear this speech; and throwing upon the fellow a look of indignation and abhorrence, I abruptly quitted the whisky-shop.

"It's a pity such a nice gal shouldn't find a mate here," observed the same crone who had before spoken loud enough for me to hear; and overwhelmed with shame and confusion, I sped away from the den of debauchery. The peasant was almost immediately by my side, offering to conduct me as far as Laing's—a proposition which I accepted. To my inexpressible annoyance I found that the little crowd of villagers persisted in following me; and every cottage that we passed, added to their



number. I could hear the strangest remarks passing amongst them. One conjectured that I had lost a lover who had run away with another young lady; and this seemed to be the opinion most generally adopted. Another intimated that perhaps I should accept Elliot's offer and not leave Gretna without a husband after all. But I will not dwell at too great a length upon a scene full of humiliations and bitter annoyances for myself. Had it not been for a paramount sense of duty in respect to my sister, I should never have been able to go through that ordeal.

In a few minutes I came in sight of a post-chaise and four, standing in front of a whisky-shop very much resembling that which I had so recently left. Here there was another little crowd gathered near the door, evidently waiting for the newly-married parties to make their appearance. I entertained an almost unconquerable loathing to enter that second den of debauchery, where I might

anticipate a repetition of the same kind of insult I had received at Elliot's: for I had already seen sufficient of Gretna-Green to be perfectly well convinced that all delicacy of feeling and all sense of propriety had been crushed out of the place by the matrimonial scenes which occurred there. Again however did a sense of duty rise paramount above all other considerations; and the crowd making way, I entered Laing's whisky-shop.

At that instant the door of an inner room was thrown open; and an old man, with white hair and a very villanous expression of countenance—dressed too in as negligent and dirty a style as the priest at the other shop—made his appearance.

"Here they come!" cried the voices of the crowd gathered outside the door. "Two couples at once! A precious good thing for you, Master Laing!"

The old man gave a knowing leer; and at the same moment, forth from the room whence he had just emerged, came the two couples alluded to. But

let the reader judge of the amazement which seized upon me, when I recognized Mr. Tomlinson and my brother Robert in the two bridegrooms, and Alderman Bull's daughters in the two brides!

CHAPTER CIX.

THE LAWYER.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of the ex-manager and Robert—while screams of terror thrilled from the throats of the two ladies. Perhaps at the moment they thought that my presence boded them no good: but they instantaneously recovered themselves, clinging each one to her husband's arm—for they no doubt reflected, upon second thoughts, that the nuptial knots being tied, there was no possibility of undoing them again.

"Hullo, Miss Price!" exclaimed Tomlinson, who was the first to break silence; and he extended his hand towards me in a self-sufficient patronizing manner: but finding that I did not take it, he muttered, "Proud and prudish as ever art thou, O damsel of the dark eyes!"

This dramatic apostrophe, which was addressed to myself, did not appear to be very satisfactory to Alderman Bull's eldest daughter who had just become Mrs. Tomlinson; and pulling at her husband's arm somewhat petulantly, she said in a sharp under-tone, "My dear, I am surprised at you!"

"My angel, I stand rebuked!" responded the ex-manager, placing one hand upon his heart; and all this ridiculous scene took place in the presence of the crowd gathered about the door, and who set up a loud "Hooray!"

I still stood in speechless amazement; and during the few moments which thus elapsed, I had an opportunity of observing that Tomlinson and my brother were very handsomely dressed, and were more bedizened with jewellery than when I had met them in the Green Park a long time back, at the time I was in Mr. Bull's service.

"Why, Mary!" Robert now hastened to observe; "what brings you here? Was it to look after us? You needn't be afraid of speaking out. This amiable and dearly beloved being who has just made me the happiest of men, knows that you are my sister!"—and he looked tenderly at Lydia.

"Most sincerely, Robert, do I hope," said I, speaking from the very bottom of my heart, "that you will be happy. No: I came not hither for any such purpose as you seem to imagine. It is the purest coincidence. But tell me—have you seen anything of Sarah?"

"Sarah? Not I," he answered. "What about her?"

"For heaven's sake don't let us stand talking here any longer," said Lydia, my brother's bride. "All those low people are staring at us."

"To be sure, my angel—it is very disagreeable," said Robert. "Bye bye, Mary: we are going back again to London when the bridal tour is over—and you can no doubt find us out."

"Oh, yes," said Lydia, bridling up: "we shall not refuse to see you, Mary:"—but she spoke to me as if I were still a menial in her service, and not as the sister of him to whom she had just been allied.

The bridal couples swept on to the post-chaise,

taking no more notice of me. Mr. Tomlinson and my brother both tossed some silver amongst the crowd, and were rewarded for their ostentatious bounty by fresh outbursts of "Hooray!" They entered the vehicle—the door was closed—the "priest" Laing made a very low bow, thereby proving that he was well satisfied with the fees he had received—and away dashed the equipage amidst the plaudits of the assembled villagers.

For a moment I felt bitterly mortified and cruelly humiliated at the treatment I had just received. I was also shocked at the heartless indifference which Robert showed when I gave him to understand that something had occurred in respect to Sarah,—an indifference, indeed, so complete that he had not even testified the commonest curiosity, much less any more anxious feeling, to learn what had happened to her. But that sense of mortification, so far as I myself was concerned, speedily gave way to one of congratulation—almost of joy—to think that my brother should at last be settled in a way which might possibly render him more steady than he had been: for although these were evidently run-away matches, I could not think that Alderman Bull would leave his daughters long unforgiven, or to suffer want.

Such were the reflections that swept rapidly through my mind during the minute or two which followed the departure of the equipage; and now I again found myself the object of curiosity on the part of the assembled crowd,—of more curiosity indeed than before; for they had heard that I was the sister of one of the dashing gentlemen who had just passed through the nuptial ceremony. It was no doubt inspired by this same consideration that Mr. Laing advanced cap in hand; bowing and scraping—and reeling too a little at the same time: for he was evidently in his cups. Instead of a fur-cap, such as Elliot wore, his was a woollen one of a plaid pattern, and shaped like a night-cap, with a tassel at the top—but so grimy and greasy, it was impossible to distinguish one colour from another. This cap was it that he swung to and fro in his hand, as he stood before me making his staggering bows.

My inquiries were soon put, and the reader knows of what nature they were.

"No such a couple has been here, Miss," responded the old man. "Have you axed at t'other shop?"

"Yes: we have been to Elliot's," said the peasant, who served as my guide; "and he don't know nuffin about it. But here's Baillie! Praps he do: though if they was po-shay people they wouldn't go to his house."

These last words were uttered aside to me and old Laing. The object of the remarks, who had just entered the whisky-shop, was likewise an old man—far less respectable in appearance than either of the two "priests" I had already seen.

"Yes—here's Baillie," observed Laing. "He keeps the toll-bar on the Sark,"—alluding to the river which is the dividing line between Scotland and England. "I say, Baillie, here's a young lassie as wants to know whether a dashing young chap with lightish hair, and a very handsome gal with fine black hair and dark eyes—I suppose they was in a po-shay?"

"I han't seen no such sort of folks," answered Baillie, staring very hard at me; and he likewise

seemed as if he had taken so much whisky that it would not be prudent of him to venture too close to the bank of the river on which his toll-bar was situated.

"There's nothing I can do for you, Miss, be there?" asked Laing, with more bowings and scrapings. "It don't seem as how that you want my assistance in a certain way just at this moment: but it might happen—who knows—and if so, I hope you'll patronize my shop."

I put into his hand a similar donation to that which I had given Elliot ere now; and he evidently looked disappointed. Perhaps he thought that nothing but gold ought to be showered upon him that day. Baillie muttered a few words about "summut to drink for himself;" but I hurried out of the place;—and still accompanied by my peasant-guide—still followed too by the crowd—retraced my way to the spot where the post-chaise which had brought me to Gretna was waiting.

"You see, Miss," observed the peasant, "that them as you axes about hasn't been nigh the place."

"Are there no more persons in the village by whom marriage-certificates are given?" I inquired.

"Yes," he answered: "there's more priests—but they're all low chaps, and only gets shepherds, and cowherds, and weavers, and such like poor folks to be spliced."

"Then it is of no use making inquiries of them," I said: and a profound sigh rose up from my heart—for I now entertained the worst misgivings in respect to my unfortunate sister.

At the very moment I reached the place where the post-chaise was waiting, Walter and Melissa made their appearance down the carriage-road leading from Gretna Hall. They were arm-in-arm; and their countenances were radiant with satisfaction,—this feeling on the lady's part being however tempered by a little modest confusion, such as she doubtless thought it was proper for a bride to assume. The gentleman, who was not of more than medium stature, though very well made, walked as erect and proud as if he were a conqueror just returned from the scenes of his triumphs: but he every minute bent down to address a few whispering words to his bride, who, as before said, was exceedingly short. On beholding me, the gentleman asked if I had succeeded in the object which had brought me to Gretna?—and with tears in my eyes I responded in the negative. I gave a few shillings to my peasant-guide, thus reducing my stock of money to the very lowest ebb: but I took no thought at the time of what I was to do when I got back to Carlisle—for my mind was almost completely engrossed by the circumstance of Robert's marriage, and by grief and suspense on behalf of Sarah.

We entered the post-chaise, which began whirling us back towards Carlisle. The newly-married couple conversed together for some few minutes in low whispers—but kept throwing sidelong glances towards me; and I could not help at length perceiving that I was the object of their discourse. Presently they left off talking thus; and the bride, looking at me, said, "Are you going back to Herne Bay—where, as I believe you told us, you came from?"

"I know not whither I am going," was my

mournful answer. "I am so situated that I cannot at once determine what I shall do."

"Tell me," said Melissa, "are you in want of funds? Pray excuse me for asking the question. We are not very rich at present: but still, as you have rendered me a service by accompanying me hither—"

"I most sincerely thank you," was my answer, interrupting her in the midst of her sentence. "To speak candidly, my funds are exhausted: but I possess the wherewith to replenish my purse. I am not going back to Herne Bay; for I gave up my situation there:—and I could not help weeping as I thought of all the circumstances which had thus hurried me away from Lady Talbot's service."

"Mr. Ward and I were thinking," continued the bride—and now for the first time I learnt the gentleman's surname—a surname which the lady herself spoke with a certain simpering, as if half-proud yet half-confused to use it as her own,—“we were thinking that as it will be impossible for our own maid to accompany us on our tour, and as we intend to leave her the means of getting home to her friends as soon as she can, that if you like to take her place—”

"Pardon me for a moment?" I ejaculated, with a suddenness that somewhat startled the newly-married pair, and which arose from the abruptness with which the reminiscence itself had flashed thus to my mind: "but if it be not impertinent, ma'am, are you not the daughter of Mr. Screwby, a solicitor in London?"

"No—not his daughter—his niece," was the reply. "But wherefore do you ask? and how did you know it?"

"I believe, my sweet love," said Mr. Ward, in a tender under-tone, "it was I who mentioned your late name to Mary Price at Carlisle."

"I asked the question," was my reply, "because of course you are related to the Miss Bulls—at least the Miss Bulls that were—"

"To be sure—through my cousin's marriage with their father: but it is scarcely a relationship after all. Yet why did you say the Miss Bulls that *were*. They are the Miss Bulls still, and likely to remain so all their lives—don't you think they are, Walter?"

"I do, my dear: for they possess none of those delightful, amiable qualities which are calculated to ensnare the heart of an admirer:—and as he spoke, he looked significantly and tenderly at his bride, as if to give her to understand that she *did* possess all those fascinations to which he had alluded."

"You will be somewhat surprised at a certain coincidence which has taken place," said I. "Indeed, it is almost a wonder that you missed seeing them just now—"

"What in heaven's name do you mean?" ejaculated Mrs. Ward. "Have they come in search of us? Is it possible that my uncle set them off in pursuit?"

"Nothing of the kind, ma'am," I answered: "but at the very time that you were at Gretna Hall just now, Alderman Bull's daughters were being united elsewhere."

"What? married?—*they!*—at Gretna-Green!" exclaimed both the bridegroom and bride, as if speaking in the same breath.

"It is indeed so," was my response.

"That post-chaise and four which we saw dash out of the village," said Mr. Ward to Melissa,— "perhaps it was their's?"

"Yes—and therefore it can be no very great way in advance," said I.

"And did you see them, Mary? did they know you? did they speak to you? whom have they married? what sort of looking persons are the bridegrooms? where did the ceremony take place?"—and thus in a moment was I overwhelmed by a dozen questions put volubly from the lips of both Mr. and Mrs. Ward.

I thought it would be malicious and ungenerous to inform the newly-married pair that Alderman Bull's daughters had married two mere adventurers, one of whom was unfortunately my own brother. Besides, I thought that I discerned on both their parts a certain expression of look which showed that they entertained no very kindly feeling towards those two ladies, and that it would be not altogether without pleasure they would hear of the inauspicious matches they had made. At all events, I thought the truth might as well be told them from any other lips rather than mine.

"Yes—I saw the Miss Bulls," was the guarded answer that I accordingly gave; "and I saw their husbands too. One was a tall fine-looking man—the other young and slender. But it is more than probable you will encounter them at Carlisle, if you intend to remain long there."

"We shall remain there until to-morrow," replied Mr. Ward: "for after the fatigues of so much travelling——"

"I really think, my dear Walter," interrupted Melissa,— "that, everything considered, it would be better to avoid meeting those odious young women. You know I never liked them."

"And I never could bear them," replied the gentleman. "But what were you going to suggest, my dear Melissa?"

"That we should leave Carlisle presently, and go somewhere else. But of course, my love, I am in your hands."

"And I in your's, my angel. Consider how you have travelled—what fatigues you have endured! and you are not over strong. But perhaps we shall see when we get to the hotel."

"The coincidence is truly remarkable," observed Mrs. Ward, who had not yet recovered from her astonishment at the intelligence I had given her relative to the alderman's daughters. "I have no doubt Mrs. Bull—or Mrs. Alderman Bull, as she styles herself—will be infinitely delighted to get rid of her two grown-up daughters-in-law."

"And won't she have an extra drop from her medicine-bottle on the strength of it?" exclaimed Mr. Ward with malicious significance.

"Ah! that is too severe, my dear Walter," said the bride, in a tone of gentle remonstrance. "We must not be too hard upon others. But now that I think of it," she continued, addressing herself to me, "you have not given an answer to the proposal I made you. Indeed, I should be much obliged if you would accept it: for the illness of my own maid is exceedingly awkward, and there will be no time to find another at Carlisle. If you do not think fit to stay with us altogether, you can engage merely for a few weeks, while we travel about."

"Again do I express my gratitude," said I, "for the offer you have made me; and I accept it with much pleasure."

I came to this determination for several reasons. In the first place, in order to travel back into Kent, I should have been compelled to raise funds upon the watch which Mrs. Kingston had given me, or upon my other trinkets, which were all gifts that I valued; and such an alternative was by no means agreeable. In the second place, I could not very well go back to Lady Talbot's, after giving her to understand that it was by no means probable that I should return to her again; and though I knew I should be welcome at Kingston Grange, yet I thought it would seem very much as if I made a convenience of the excellent lady of that mansion by throwing up my situation at one moment and returning to it the next. In the third place, I was deeply anxious to obtain intelligence of Sarah. That she and Mr. Selden had come northward, was very evident: they might be travelling about—and as Mr. and Mrs. Ward likewise intended to make a tour, I thus had the chance of pursuing my search after my misguided sister without any expense to myself. For all these reasons had I resolved to accept the proposal made by the newly-married couple; and thus, having accompanied them in a mere friendly capacity to Gretna-Green, it was as a domestic in their service that I returned with them to Carlisle.

CHAPTER CX.

MY ELEVENTH PLACE.

We did not overtake the post-chaise containing Mr. Tomlinson, my brother, and the two brides; and as we saw nothing of them on alighting again at the hotel at which we had put up at Carlisle, it was of course concluded that they had taken up their quarter at some other inn. Under these circumstances Mr. and Mrs. Ward decided upon remaining at Carlisle until the following day. I retired to my own chamber, and addressed myself to a very painful task: namely, that of penning a letter to William informing him of Sarah's flight with Mr. Selden; but I did not forget to record a fervent hope that their connexion was by this time sanctioned by the marriage-rites. It was indeed a hope to which I clung tenaciously: for I dared not think deliberately of the arguments which my fears suggested against it. I likewise wrote, according to promise, to Mrs. Chaplin in London,—informing her of my fruitless journey to Gretna-Green, and renewing my thanks for the kindness I had received from her when in Conduit Street.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when my letters were finished; and I was descending the stairs to the bar of the hotel to leave them there, in order that they might be sent to the post, when I heard a voice which I thought I recognized, talking very loud in the passage. On reaching the foot of the staircase, I at once recognized Mr. Screwby. Yes: there he was—the same little thin old gentleman that I had seen at Alderman Bull's—his sharp features looking sharper than ever—his quick green eyes vibrating restlessly—and the rapidity of his speech being accompanied with an exceeding vehemence of gesture. He was talking to the land-

lord, who appeared to be listening with cool indifference and unconcern, as if accustomed to the angry tirades of the pursuers of fugitive couples visiting the north for matrimonial purposes.

"And you tell me," cried Mr. Screwby, "that you don't know the names of any persons in your hotel, and that it is not your business to give descriptions of them? But I can tell you that there is such a thing as law—and what's more, I am a lawyer myself. But, by jingo! here's somebody I ought to know!" he ejaculated, on perceiving me. "Why, it's Mary Price, as sure as I am a living man!"

The little lawyer bounded towards me: and seizing me by the arm, exclaimed, "I am sure you have something to do with this. Where's my niece Melissa? where's my clerk Ward? where are the Miss Bulls? Come, answer, Mary Price! I can tell by your looks that you know all about it."

"I beg, sir," was my response, "that you will not hold me in this way: you hurt me."

"Hurt you! it's enough to make a man hurt any body! There's the Alderman, my son-in-law, laid up with the gout, as all good Aldermen ought to be—though devilishly inconvenient just at this moment; and there are his girls, bolted—run away with two common swindlers, as far as we can learn. And then there's my niece—an heiress—bolted and run away likewise—with my managing clerk! By heavens! it's too bad. Come then, tell me all about it: for I am sure that you wouldn't be here if you hadn't something to do with it, after having been in the Alderman's service."

"Mr. Screwby," I said indignantly, "I had nothing to do with these elopements."

"Oh, very well! We shall see. I dare say the parties ain't very far off. I will search every room in the house till I find them."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the landlord; "but you won't do any such thing. This is my house, you know—not your's; and an Englishman's house is his castle. That's the law—which, if you are a lawyer, you must know well enough."

"The law be hanged!" ejaculated Mr. Screwby: "it's all nonsense! Come, Mary Price, tell me the truth."

"I must decline answering any questions, sir."

"Then I will hunt for myself:"—and before the landlord could stretch forth a hand to detain the excited lawyer, he rushed up-stairs and speedily disappeared from our view.

I gave my letters in at the bar, and was ascending the staircase again, when I heard a scream; and at once recognizing my new mistress's voice, I sped to the sitting-room occupied by herself and her husband. I just arrived in time: for Melissa, on seeing her uncle, had fainted.

"Get restoratives, Mary," said Mr. Ward: and as there was a decanter of water on the sideboard, I began to bathe my mistress's temples as she lay stretched senseless upon the sofa.

"A pretty scoundrel you are!" vociferated Mr. Screwby, addressing these vituperative words to his fugitive clerk—for such indeed it appeared that Melissa's husband was.

"Whatever you may have to say, sir," replied Ward, assisting me to recover his wife, "keep it for a future occasion. You see the state to which you have reduced your niece."

"Niece, indeed! I discard her!" ejaculated Mr. Screwby: "and what's more, I will keep her out of her money till she is twenty-one. You sha'n't get a penny of it till then: and that's three years to wait!"

"I can afford to wait three years for thirty thousand pounds," retorted Walter with a mocking laugh: "and in the mean time it won't be very hard to raise what we shall want."

"You consummate scoundrel, you!" ejaculated the attorney, his naturally pale countenance becoming purple with rage.

"Take care what you say, sir," responded Mr. Ward coolly; "or I will have my action for damages against you. I hav'n't been ten years in your office for nothing; and perhaps I shall know how to take a leaf out of your book."

At this moment Melissa opened her eyes; and on perceiving her uncle, she closed them again in evident affright.

"Don't mind him, my dearest girl," whispered her husband: "he can't take you away from me. The knot has been tied too firm for him to undo it."

The lady opened her eyes again, and sat up on the sofa. She threw a furtive look at Mr. Screwby, who was standing near, quivering from head to foot with a rage which he could scarcely control, but the futility of giving vent to which he could scarcely have helped feeling. At length he said in a calmer tone than before, "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Melissa, for what you have done?—sacrificing all your fine prospects——"

"Now, I tell you what it is, sir," interrupted Mr. Ward, placing himself between his wife and the lawyer: "you shall not bully your niece in my presence. She is now my wife; and I have not only a right to protect her, but the inclination to do so. If you want to vent your wrath upon anybody, go and find out the Alderman's daughters."

"Ah! I dare say you were all in league together, and it was a general runaway affair—a clubbing of elopements."

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Screwby," exclaimed Ward: "there was nothing concerted between us and them. But that they are married as well as we are, I can assure you: for they were at Gretna just now. So pray be off in search of them; and leave us here to ourselves."

"Melissa, one word with you—only just one word?" said the lawyer, now suddenly adopting a grave and serious tone. "It is merely a last piece of advice I want to give you—and you had better hear it, I can assure you."

"Have the kindness to write it, sir," said the ex-clerk: "for I must decline permitting you any private speech with this lady who is now my wife."

"But I am her guardian, sir—her guardian until she becomes of age—her guardian under the will of her late father, who was my own brother!"

"Can't be helped, sir. Mrs. Ward," added my new master, accentuating the name, "is not in a condition to bear any excitement now."

"Then I shall leave you both to your own course," exclaimed Mr. Screwby in a voice that was again full of rage. "Not one penny shall I allow you for three years to come; and if you like to ruin yourselves by borrowing of Jews, do so—the sooner the better. But perhaps I shall even find a way of

punishing you more than you seem to have an idea of."

With these words he flung out of the room, leaving the door wide open, which Mr. Ward hastened to close with a violent bang, as if to shut out an individual whom he now set at defiance. Melissa began to cry bitterly; but when Mr. Ward called her his angel, his love, his darling, and all possible tender epithets, she became soothed; and in a few minutes could even smile at the furious rage in which her uncle had departed, and at the idea that he would go and vent it all upon the Alderman's daughters if he could find them.

I think that Mr. Ward felt himself a little humiliated in my presence; as he now knew that I was acquainted with the position he had formerly filled—namely, that of a clerk: for he had a great deal of false pride, and was evidently anxious to be thought a thorough gentleman. I did not for a moment believe his high-flown testimonials of affection towards his bride to be sincere: one or two little expressions he had let drop, had convinced me that it was the lady's money he was looking after—and that if she had been as poor as himself, he never would have run away with her to Gretna-Green. There was something forced in the endearments which he bestowed upon her; while on the other hand, those she lavished on him, were of a sickly and maudlin kind, without the fervour of romance, and without the true depth of feeling which shines forth from a rational yet sincere and devoted love. That she did love her husband, there could not be any doubt: but it was that kind of love which was based on a sort of school-girl caprice, and had nothing solid nor enduring in its nature. I had not therefore known my new master and mistress many hours, before I was enabled to prophecy in my own heart that this was not a marriage which would turn out happily.

On the following day we left Carlisle by the coach for Penrith—a town in the same county. I saw nothing more of Mr. Tomlinson, my brother, and the Alderman's daughters: and I was glad of it. I should observe that my new mistress, who possessed a naturally generous heart, left ample funds (at least so far as she could afford to do so) for the use of the sick servant-maid who had remained at Carlisle. And I must add, in justice to Mrs. Ward, that it was as much by the servant's own wish as by that of the lady herself, that they thus parted: for it appeared that the woman had friends in the north whom she was desirous to join: and this had been her principal motive for accompanying the two fugitives from London.

Without dwelling upon details, I may now state that a period of three weeks passed away, during which we travelled about by easy stages to the principal places in the northern counties of England. We visited the picturesque lakes of Cumberland, and if my spirits had not been so cruelly depressed by my uncertainty as to Sarah's fate, I should have enjoyed this tour exceedingly.

The more I saw of my new master and mistress, the less reason I had to like the former—but the greater to commiserate the latter. I feared that in becoming the wife, she had also become the victim of a thoroughly selfish and hypocritical individual. That his protestations of affection towards herself were of the most hollow character, was

beyond all doubt,—and if she had not been blinded by her infatuation, she would have discerned more than one proof thereof ere the first three weeks of her matrimonial life had passed over. She speedily grew communicative with me. It appeared that Mr. Scrawby had always kept her so short of money that it was with considerable difficulty she had, on some pretence, obtained from him a hundred pounds,—the real object being to defray the expenses of the flight to Gretna and the nuptial tour. Thus, at the end of the three weeks, the treasury was arriving at so low an ebb that it was resolved to proceed to London, where Mr. Ward purposed to raise a loan on his wife's expectations, so as to commence housekeeping. The cost of travelling and living at hotels, had soon run away with the money; and as Mr. Ward was evidently inclined to be very extravagant—drinking the most expensive wines at dinner, and living in a luxurious way—besides tossing his gold about in an ostentatious manner—nothing like a prudential economy had been observed.

It was about a month after I had left London on my useless journey to the North, that I entered the metropolis again in company with Mr. and Mrs. Ward. I had obtained not the slightest trace of Mr. Selden and my sister—although, wherever we had halted during our tour, I had not failed to make the most careful inquiries. Perhaps they also had returned to London?—and this I thought was most probable; as a gay young man like Lady Talbot's nephew was not one who could remain long absent from the pleasures of the metropolis.

On arriving in London, Mr. Ward decided upon putting up for a few days at a hotel in Piccadilly; and I took the earliest opportunity of paying Mrs. Chaplin a visit. She received me with great kindness; but in answer to the very first query which I put, she informed me that she had neither heard nor seen anything of Mr. Selden. She however agreed with me that if he were not already in London, he doubtless soon would be; and I therefore resolved to remain some little while longer in the service of my present master and mistress. I accordingly wrote to Fanny at Herne Bay, to request that she would send me up my boxes; and in a couple of days they duly arrived, accompanied by a note from the maid-servant herself, telling me that Lady Talbot had become so sick of the sea-side that the family were on the point of returning to the Abbey.

During the month which had elapsed since I quitted Lady Talbot's service, I had been so uncertain of my movements that I was unable to inform William where he could write to me with any assurance of my receiving his letters. But now that I was in London, with the purpose of remaining there for some weeks, I wrote to him, stating where he could write to me. The return of post brought a letter, expressing his deep affliction at Sarah's flight. She had not written to him; and from this circumstance I drew an evil augury. If she were really married to Mr. Selden, would she not have been too happy to communicate the circumstance to her brother, so that he in his turn might make it known to me? From this silence on her part, I was therefore compelled to draw an inference which banished all hope on her account from my bosom. To say that I shed tears on reading William's letter,

would only be to record what the reader must naturally suppose; and indeed, during the past month, I had wept very, very often—and very bitter tears on my sister's behalf. I had of course communicated to William the circumstance of Robert's marriage with Miss Bull; and he, as well as myself, hoped that it would lead him to settle down into a steady line of life.

We had been a fortnight at the hotel; and every day, immediately after breakfast, Mr. Ward went out to see, as he said, about raising some money. At first he was wont to return in two or three hours: but gradually his absence grew more protracted—till at length he did not come back till dinner-time at five in the evening. Once or twice I heard Mrs. Ward complain to him how dull she was, being left alone at the hotel all day by herself: but he answered her rather snappishly, that he was out on business and that he couldn't help it. At last he remained away till nearly midnight; and then he came back in a state of complete inebriation. I had been sitting up with my mistress, who was very low in spirits, nervous, and desponding; and I saw that she could scarcely restrain her tears as her husband came staggering into her presence, with his countenance flushed, his eyes red, and his dress in disorder. I immediately quitted the room to spare Mrs. Ward the humiliation of knowing that I was a spectatrix of this sight. On the following morning I thought of calling again on Mrs. Chaplin, whom I had not seen since the day after our arrival in London; and I accordingly repaired to the sitting-room to request permission to go out for an hour or two. Mrs. Ward was seated at breakfast alone, her husband not having yet risen. She seemed very unhappy, although she endeavoured to conceal her feelings from me to the utmost of her power. While I was speaking to her, a waiter entered; and presenting a paper, said somewhat hesitatingly, "The second weekly bill, if you please, ma'am; and it's the rule of the house to have *weekly* settlements."

"Oh, very well!" replied my mistress. "Mr. Ward will see to it in the course of the day."

"If you please, ma'am," said the waiter, somewhat pointedly: and he quitted the room.

"It's very disagreeable," observed Mrs. Ward to me, "that Mr. W. cannot get this little business of our's settled at once. It is enough to cause him vexation, poor man!" she added, as a sort of delicate apology for the condition in which I had seen him on the previous night. "The position is rather a ludicrous one. Here am I the heiress to thirty thousand pounds, and yet cannot touch a single guinea! I am afraid I did wrong not to speak to my uncle alone, when he asked me to do so at Carlisle."

At this moment Mr. Ward made his appearance, looking exceedingly unwell, and being likewise ill-tempered after his debauch. I left the apartment, having received the permission which I required. As I was putting on my things in my own room, a chambermaid entered upon some pretext; and after a few indifferent observations, she said, "I suppose it's all right with your master and missus, isn't it?"

"What do you mean? and why do you ask me?" I exclaimed, indignant at the attempt thus made to draw me into a gossip.

"Why, if you must know—or if you don't know it already—they hav'n't paid their bills yet; and *my* master is uncommon particular. He never allows the bills to run more than a fortnight. If *your* master don't pay to-night, he will be told to-morrow morning to leave the hotel; and what's worse, his luggage will be detained."

"Your master, then, will be very foolish," I said, somewhat alarmed at this intelligence: "for Mrs. Ward is an heiress, and will have a large fortune when she comes of age. In fact Mr. Ward is absent in the City every day, negotiating for a loan; and if I tell you all this, it is that you may convince *your* master and mistress that *mine* are perfectly competent to settle their accounts."

"Ah!" ejaculated the chambermaid, with a toss of her head and a strange incredulous look: "Heiresses and people having business in the City are always putting up at hotels; but the worst of it is that the heiresses never inherit their fortunes, and the gentlemen are always meeting with disappointments in the City. I can tell you that this dodge won't do at a London hotel. However, of course *my* master will know how to deal with *your's*: but it's a hard thing for us servants, who get no regular wages, to have to work for people for nothing."

"I can assure you," said I, "it will not be the case in this instance."

"That you think so, I have no doubt," answered the chambermaid: "for you are a respectable young woman. But I am afraid that you will get taken in with the rest. Ah! you don't know the tricks that people play now-a-days—particularly when they put up at hotels."

"But I know," said I vehemently, "that Mrs. Ward will have no less a sum than thirty thousand pounds in three years' time. I heard her own uncle, who is likewise her guardian, say as much. He is a highly respectable man—Mr. Screwby, the solicitor."

"Well, I hope it may turn out so," remarked the chambermaid: "but master doesn't seem to have much faith, and he's a pretty good judge of people's goings-on. You see, Mr. Ward lives in a way as if he didn't mean to pay. There's nothing too good for him—turtle and venison, iced champagne, hock, and claret—and yet two weekly bills still unpaid. It doesn't look at all right."

I said nothing more; and the chambermaid left the room. Issuing forth from the hotel, I wended my way towards Conduit Street, which was at no great distance; and as I proceeded thither, I could not help reflecting disagreeably upon what the chambermaid had said. For although, as I thought, there could be no doubt as to Mrs. Ward's prospective fortune, yet it certainly did appear as if her husband was experiencing more difficulties than he had at first anticipated in raising money for present uses. Thus pondering upon matters, I reached Mrs. Chaplin's house. She had nothing to tell me relative to Mr. Selden: she had neither seen nor heard anything of him. After spending an hour with her, I was retracing my way to the hotel, when on passing down the Quadrant, I observed the well-known figure of the Gipsy Queen turning into one of the little narrow streets diverging thence. She was dressed in the same middle-class style she had adopted at Herne Bay; and happening to turn her

head at the moment, she perceived me. Beekoning me to follow, she walked on for a little distance; and then she stopped short in the middle of a secluded street.

"Accident again throws us together," she said, taking my hand; and I returned her pressure cordially—for I could never forget how she had been instrumental in saving my life from the murderous hands of the Bulldog and Sawbridge. "I heard something of the reason of your precipitate departure from Herne Bay," she continued. "Missing you in your accustomed walks, I inquired of Lady Talbot's servant-maid; and she told me things which grieved me much on your account. I hope that all is satisfactory with regard to your sister. Alas, poor Mary!" she added, perceiving the tears run down my cheeks: "you need not answer me in words."

"I am indeed afflicted," I said, half-suffocated with sobs.

"And such a fine, beautiful girl too!" exclaimed the Gipsy Queen, in a tone of profound commiseration. "This is a world full of troubles, Mary Price; and no one knows it better than yourself:"—then after a pause, she said, "Perhaps you are ignorant of what occurred at Herne Bay after you left? I mean in respect to those persons concerning whom I went thither."

"Yes—I am completely ignorant of everything that has happened in that part of Kent."

"Yet it was in the newspapers," observed the Gipsy Queen.

"What was in the newspapers?" I asked quickly. "I have been travelling about in the North of England, and therefore beyond the reach of mere local intelligence. As for the newspapers, I so seldom read them."

"You cannot have forgotten that scene upon the beach at Herne Bay?" said the Gipsy Queen. "It was I, who, by an anonymous letter, induced Captain Tollemache to come thither. I knew where the letter would reach him; and you saw that he *did* come. You saw likewise how mercilessly he exposed Lady Davenant, and how severely he chastised that man whom I must not name. Well, there was a duel after that: and the man whom I name not, was wounded in the right arm. He had it amputated. My vengeance is appeased!"

"O Barbauld!" I exclaimed, shocked at what I heard: "you cannot rejoice in having brought this about?"

"Rejoice, Mary Price! If you had loved as I loved, and been treated as I was treated, you also would rejoice in consummating your vengeance. But no—I was wrong to speak thus: you would not rejoice—you are incapable of revenge. But you are not like the generality of the world; and therefore you must not judge the feelings of others by your own. Where you would pardon and show mercy, others would pursue their vengeance implacably. I have done so. At first, I frankly confess it was that man's life which I hoped would be taken: but when I heard that he had been maimed—that his right arm was cut off—and that the personal beauty of which he was so proud, was thus marred—I relented somewhat: I became satisfied—the more so, that my vengeance had fallen likewise upon Lady Davenant: for so terrific was the exposure which she experienced at the hands of the

infuriate Tollemache, that the man whom I forbear from naming dared not outrage public opinion to such an extent as to harbour her more. They separated—he retiring, maimed and ill, to his mansion near Sturry—she departing precipitately, I know not whither. Did I not tell you, Mary Price," added the Gipsy Queen, "that my idea of vengeance embraced not the crime of murder to be committed by my own hands? But enough of this topic. Is there anything I can do for you? can I serve you in any way?"

I expressed my thanks to Barbauld Azetha for the offer which she thus made, at the same time assuring her that there was no way in which her services could avail me. We then separated; and I returned to the hotel—where I found that my mistress was alone, my master having gone out as usual. I now thought it right to intimate to Mrs. Ward some portion of what the chambermaid had said in the morning—especially as I had taken it upon myself to prove to the woman that my mistress had the most brilliant pecuniary prospects. Mrs. Ward thanked me for what I had said, adding she had made up her mind, if her husband should fail in procuring money that day, that she would herself call upon her uncle on the following one, and endeavour to make her peace with him. She was very desponding indeed—downright unhappy; as I could too plainly perceive, although for pride's sake she endeavoured to assume a cheerful air in my presence. I do not think that she regretted her run-away match: her foolish fondness for an undeserving man yet retained too much of its infatuation to allow such a feeling on her part. But I am certain that she was deeply mortified at the pecuniary embarrassments in which she found herself placed so soon after her marriage, and likewise pained at being so much separated from her husband.

Five o'clock came—and the waiter entered the room to inquire whether Mrs. Ward would have dinner served up, or stay till her husband returned. She preferred the latter course. He had ordered as usual a splendid repast, with the promise of being home punctual; and she made sure that he would keep his word. An hour elapsed—then another—then another: and it was not till eight o'clock that Mr. Ward made his appearance. His countenance was flushed with drinking—his gait was a little unsteady: but still he was not completely intoxicated. I had remained with my mistress the greater portion of the afternoon, by her own desire: but on Mr. Ward's arrival, I of course quitted the room. In an hotel, the alternatives for the domestic of a private family were the servants' room down-stairs, or else her own chamber; and I preferred the latter. I was sitting reading in my room—about an hour after Mr. Ward's return—when the chamber-maid who had spoken to me in the morning, made her appearance.

"There!" she said: "it is just as I told you—and there's a pretty mess of 't!"

"What is the matter?" I inquired, with some degree of alarm.

"Why, there's no money—and not likely to be any. My master, in consequence of what I told him, has been to Mr. Screwby's—but only succeeded in seeing him about an hour ago. Mr. Screwby says that he has thrown his niece's affairs into



Chancery—that he will have nothing more to do with them—and besides that, there seems to be some persons now disputing her late father's will: so that it is very uncertain whether she will have any money at all. Of course Mr. Ward has not been able to get any in the City; and my master says that they must quit the hotel the first thing to-morrow morning. Under the circumstances he feels some degree of pity for your mistress; and he won't therefore detain the boxes: but he has made up his mind that they shall tramp the first thing after breakfast. *Your* master, who seems half tipsy, blustered and tried to ride the high horse; but it wouldn't do—and so you will have to leave to-morrow. I am really sorry for you; because I am sure you will be taken in, as we are. Here am I, regularly done out of my money for fifteen days' attendance upon your master and mistress. Isn't it a hard case?"

"I am truly sorry," was my reply: "but I cer-

tainly will remunerate you for what you have done for me."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the chambermaid, who was not a bad-hearted woman: "you will want your money before long, I can see. I wouldn't rob you of it for all the world. But there's a bell ringing for me! Good night:"—and she hurried away.

These were unpleasant tidings which she had communicated; and I knew not what my master and mistress would do. Suddenly I recollected Mrs. Ward's assurance that she would call and see her uncle; and I sincerely hoped it would produce some good effect. I did not like my own position at all: but I was not so heartless as to leave my poor mistress in the midst of her troubles. I had not the slightest sympathy for Mr. Ward—but a great deal for his wife, who had been made the victim of her infatuation and folly. While I was thus reflecting, the chambermaid returned to the

room, saying, "You are to put on your things and accompany your mistress somewhere at once. She has sent for a hackney-coach, and is going out."

I now saw that matters had become so urgent that she had resolved to visit her uncle this evening. I hastily put on my bonnet and shawl; and on descending to the sitting-room, found that Mrs. Ward was ready. She looked very unhappy—now no longer having the courage to make an effort to conceal it. Mr. Ward was drinking brandy-and-water, and was evidently quite inebriated.

"Mind you pitch the old fellow a fine story, 'Lissa," he said in a tipsy voice, broken by many hiccups; "and bring back good news with you. At all events he *must* come down with enough to get us out of this precious mess here."

The poor young lady kissed her husband before we went away; and she whispered something in his ear. I felt certain it was an urgent entreaty that he would not drink any more during her absence. We sallied forth; and entering the hackney-coach, proceeded to Mr. Screwby's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. I waited in the hackney-coach while Melissa entered the dwelling. I was glad to see that she was admitted: it seemed to be a good sign—for I had been fearful that the door would remain closed against her. Half-an-hour passed, and I said to myself that appearances were improving. At the expiration of that interval the front-door opened again—she came hurriedly forth—and on precipitately entering the coach, threw herself back and burst into an agony of grief. Poor creature! how sincerely I pitied her; and I did my best to console her as the vehicle rolled back to the hotel.

"All in vain! all in vain!" she murmured in broken accents. "The very worst has taken place. What in the name of heaven are we to do? Discarded—disowned—sterily rejected—Oh, Mary Price, I am the most wretched of women!"—and again her affliction burst forth with convulsing violence.

"Is it possible, ma'am," I said, "that your uncle is so cruel?"

"Cruel, Mary! he has proved himself a perfect monster. I could not have believed it. The threats which he uttered at Carlisle have been faithfully and mercilessly executed. Heavens, is it a reality? or is it a dream? Did I fall upon my knees before him? did he tell me that he had done his best to work my ruin? Not a penny! not a penny! My very hopes destroyed—my fortune thrown into Chancery—a disputant ferreted out—Oh, Mary! how shall I ever go back to tell my husband that it is indeed all but too true?"

Melissa was completely overwhelmed with grief—she wept and sobbed like a child. I reminded her that we were now drawing close to the hotel, and that she ought to compose her feelings to the utmost of her power: but it was with difficulty that she could follow my advice—and even, as the hackney-coach stopped, convulsive gaspings still indicated the excess of her woe. On alighting, Mrs. Ward found that she had no money with her; and I accordingly paid the hackney-coach fare from my own purse: for I had received a month's wages from her at the proper time—without which I myself should have been denuded of funds. We ascended to the

sitting-room, where Mr. Ward was still discussing his brandy-and-water. He endeavoured to rise from the sofa on which he was reclining, to address his wife—but fell back in a complete state of intoxication.

"Go up to bed, Mary," said my mistress, in a voice half-choked with emotions: for in the depth of her affliction she had not even the solace of a husband's sympathy. I bade her good night and hastened to my own chamber, deeply commiserating the position in which that poor young lady was placed.

On the following morning, at so early an hour as half-past seven, my mistress came up to my chamber; and shutting the door, she said, "Mary, we have got to leave the hotel presently. Mr. Ward wishes to go to another: but this under present circumstances is absurd. We must take lodgings. I am myself going out to seek for them now: the sooner we get away from this place the better. Oh! you know not how humiliated I feel—how thoroughly unhappy! Mr. Ward has not a single shilling left: I cannot even repay you the trifle you advanced for the coach last evening."

"Do not mention it, ma'am," said I; "and pray take whatsoever is in my purse at this moment. I am about to say something which I hope you will receive in the spirit in which it is meant. It is this, I do not wish to leave you at a time when misfortunes—which I hope are only transient—have overtaken you: but on the other hand I would not for the world remain a burthen to you—if you think that you cannot afford to keep me."

"I will not part from you, Mary," replied Mrs. Ward. "No—I cannot. I should miss you very, very much:"—and she spoke from the depths of her heart, as if she felt or foresaw that she was destined to pass many, many long hours separated from her husband each day, and that she could not endure it without my companionship. "Mr. W. says that he is certain of being enabled to raise money in a few days, and that he will find means to defeat my uncle's intentions. He does not seem to despair—and therefore I do not."

"But, madam," said I, "would it not be more seemly if Mr. Ward himself went out to look for lodgings?"

"The truth is, Mary, he is so unwell this morning he cannot get up yet. It would be ridiculous to suppose that you did not observe the state he was in last evening. But is it to be wondered at? Only conceive the vexations he has experienced! Every possible allowance must be made for him:"—and yet it was with a profound sigh that Mrs. Ward thus spoke.

I could not bear the idea of her going out alone, and at so early an hour, hunting for lodgings; and I offered to accompany her—a proposal which she gladly accepted. I bethought myself that possibly Mrs. Chaplin might know of suitable apartments; and I accordingly conducted my mistress thither. She made no secret of the circumstances in which she was placed, and with a degree of frankness which raised her in my estimation, told Mrs. Chaplin how she was temporarily pinched—how she was unable to settle the hotel bill—and how she hoped in the course of a few days to obtain funds. Mrs. Chaplin's rooms were all occupied at the time, and therefore she could not accommodate Mr. and

Mrs. Ward: nor was she able to give any positive recommendation elsewhere. All she could say was that she knew a person who lived in Poland Street, and who had lodgings to let at that particular moment. The reason she spoke in this reserved manner, was because she was not altogether satisfied that the lodgings would suit—or rather that the people of the house were the most amiable in the world: but Mrs. Ward was in too great a hurry to be over particular—and we accordingly proceeded to the address indicated. The rooms were found suitable enough—the use of Mrs. Chaplin's name was a sufficient introduction—and in a few minutes the bargain was concluded.

We then returned to the hotel, and found that Mr. Ward had just got up. I must say that the landlord and landlady of the establishment behaved very well under the circumstances. They sent up breakfast as usual, although most probably thinking that it was only augmenting an account that would never be paid; and when a hackney-coach was sent for, they suffered the luggage to be removed without the slightest word of remonstrance. But as we passed out of the hotel, the waiters who were standing in the passage, together with the chambermaid, looked very sullen and ill-tempered; and I believe that the word "swindler" was spoken loud enough to reach Mr. Ward's ears. As for myself, I felt thoroughly humiliated—as if I were one of the defaulting individuals who had run up a bill in a most extravagant manner without the possibility of liquidating it. Mrs. Ward had accepted the contents of my purse; and the porter who conveyed the luggage to the coach, was the only one of all the hotel-servants that received any money. The vehicle drove away; and I experienced an unspeakable relief when beyond the range of the sour and discontented looks of the hotel-domestics.

CHAPTER CXL.

LODGINGS.

THE apartments to which we now removed, consisted of a sitting-room on the first floor—a bed-chamber overhead for my master and mistress—and another chamber on the storey above for my use. The terms were two guineas a week, inclusive of attendance on the part of the servant of the house: for as I was in the capacity of a lady's-maid, no menial duties were expected from me. The house was kept by a couple of the name of Dobson. The man was a tall, thin, spare individual, about forty years of age, and had an office in the city. His wife presented a remarkable contrast in personal appearance—she being short, and of a corpulency which gave her a dropsical look. She was four or five years older than he—and had a very red face, with an expression of countenance that made it difficult to form a correct estimate of her character. She might be a very good-natured woman—or she might be the exact reverse: but if I had been called upon to give an opinion one way or another, I should have decided on the latter hypothesis. However, she received her new lodgers with civility, and expressed her desire to render them as comfortable as possible.

Immediately on our arrival, I ascended to my

own chamber to open my boxes, and arrange my things in the chest of drawers and cupboard. In the midst of this occupation the door opened, and the servant of the house made her appearance with clean sheets for the bed.

"Gracious goodness me!" she exclaimed, dropping the sheets and clasping her grimy hands in astonishment: "is it possible—Mary Price!"

"What, Betsy—is this you?" said I, after a moment's reflection: for I did not immediately recognize the woman who had been my fellow-servant at Mr. Messiter's. She was indeed much altered. I described her in an early chapter of this narrative as a middle-aged woman, of dirty and slovenly appearance, and with her hair as grizzly as if she had been creeping through a bush. But she now looked even worse than when I had formerly known her. She seemed as if ten years had been added to her existence: her hair was completely gray, but grizzly as ever; she was much thinner—and so far as could be discerned through a very dirty face, looked haggard and careworn. But the poor creature was very glad to see me; and she shook my hand with a warmth that testified her sincerity.

"Well, who would have thought it?" she went on to say. "I have heard speak of you, Mary, and was in hopes you was by this time high up in the world. I knowed you was in the Harlesdon family, and thought that as you had got to be with tip-top folks in great houses, you would never more have got into service with plain people which lives in lodgings."

"The world has its ups and downs, Betsy," said I. "But how have you been getting on since I saw you last?"

"Just in the old style," she answered, with a deep sigh. "I can't say no better, and I can't say no worse. As a servant-of-all-work I began life; and as a servant-of-all-work shall I continue until past work altogether, and thrown upon the parish. And all work it is too, with a vengeance! You know what I used to have to do at Messiter's? Well, I have been in twenty places since then, and never found less to do—but sometimes more. So it is, I think, here. Now, I have to get up every morning at five o'clock—and work, work, work all day long till eleven or twelve at night. I got seven pound a-year, to find my own tea and sugar, at Messiter's; and I get just the same here."

"Are there any other lodgers in the house," said I, "besides Mr. and Mrs. Ward?"

"To be sure! The back room on the first floor and the back room on the second floor—which of course lets cheaper than the front ones—is each occupied by a single man. One's a clerk in the Post-Office, and t'other an assistant at a linendraper's. They both want their breakfasts early; and as there's only one tea-pot in use for them two rooms, it's a difficult thing to manage. Howsoever, it is managed by hook or by crook; and thank God, they are out all day long and seldom come home till late at night. But it's Sunday that's the wusserst day for me; for then they dine at home, and perhaps each will have two or three friends in the evening—and there's such a scrimmage for tumblers and glasses, and it's no easy matter to make three plated spoons serve for the hot grog of eight or ten people, and them in two different rooms. If there's anything to blame, all the fault is found with me; and

sometimes they tell me I am untidy and slovenly. I wonder whether they would have me put on a silk gown to dress three or four dinners on a Sunday?"

"Does not your mistress assist?" I inquired.

"Only the front-room lodgers," responded Betsy; "and then only when she is fit to do it. She drinks horrid—and very often has to roll up to bed about four o'clock."

"What is her husband?" I asked.

"Dobson? I don't know what he is. He has got a little office in the City, and I think he calls himself a General Agent. I will bring you up one of his what-d'ye-call-em—Oh! spectacles—presently; and then you will see." But as Betsy thus spoke, she fumbled in her pocket; and drawing forth a cotton handkerchief, some bits of faded ribbon, a ball of string, a little housewife, an end of tallow-candle, and two or three soiled and crumpled letters, she produced a printed prospectus, of small size and in the form of a circular. "Here!" she exclaimed; "I've got one!"

Thus speaking, she handed it to me; and I found that its contents were as follow:—

"Titus Dobson, of No—, Poland Street, and of Barge Yard, Bucklersbury, begs to inform the nobility and gentry, and the public generally, that he conducts the General Agency business with punctuality and despatch, as likewise upon moderate terms. Loans negotiated in the strictest confidence; and as T. D. is in connexion with an eminent capitalist, having £500,000 to lay out at interest, the bills of respectable persons are discounted. Clergymen in want of temporary loans, will do well to avail themselves of this opportunity.

"T. D. carries on the House Agency business, and has always a number of desirable premises, and eligible dwellings upon his books. He has lately increased his business by adding the department of an address office for servants.

"Consignments of goods received from the country for disposal in London; and as T. D. has peculiar channels for effecting sales, traders wishing to dispose of their surplus goods, would find this an excellent medium. Money invested on good security and in a lucrative manner.

"T. D. receives orders for wines in bottle or in wood. Bottled ale and stout, prime qualities.

"T. D. begs to add that he does business in the Coal Trade. Orders promptly executed.

"Debts collected for a small commission; accounts audited; tradesmen's books posted; and balance sheets for the Bankruptcy Court drawn up. Schedules prepared for the Insolvents' Court. Good bail provided on the shortest notice for ladies or gentlemen who from peculiar circumstances may require such accommodation.

"Noblemen, gentlemen, and tradesmen in difficulties, would do well to place their affairs in the hands of T. D., whose large experience enables him to effect arrangements and compositions which save the ruinous expenses of the law.

"T. D. undertakes to appraise stock, and effect prompt sales for furniture, plate, linen, wines, &c.; also to negotiate all matrimonial alliances with delicacy and discretion. Gentlemen and ladies, wishing to find suitable partners for life, and not having the opportunity in their own circle of acquaintances, should consult T. D. Fee, five shillings. Several ladies and gentlemen with large fortunes, are on T. D.'s list.

"N. B. Letters containing remittances punctually attended to.

"Observe! Mr. Dobson may always be consulted at his office in the City from ten in the morning till four in the afternoon, and afterwards at his residence in Poland Street. Persons waited upon at their own private dwellings

"Pawnbrokers' duplicates disposed of."

I could not help smiling as I read this document: for I had never before heard of any one of such extensive and miscellaneous avocations as Mr. Titus Dobson. He seemed to be a perfect utilitarian in his way,—his experience and business apparently embracing almost every possible exigency or want known to society. But I scarcely thought that he could be a very respectable man; and the account I had already received of his wife, did not give me a more elevated opinion of herself.

"And are you the only servant in the house?" I asked of Betsy. "Are you expected to do the whole of the work and wait upon all the inmates?"

"Yes—and help at the washing on Mondays into the bargain. Then I get up at three in the morning, summer or winter, to light the copper and get breakfast by the time the charwoman comes."

"And how long have you been here?"

"Going on for a twelvemonth. I don't like it, you may be sure: but what can I do? I have changed so often and never bettered myself, that I am afraid of finding things grow wusser and wusser. But now, do tell me whether you have ever heard or seen anything of them Messieurs?"

I told Betsy how they had come down in the world; and as the woman possessed a real good heart, she showed much sympathy for poor Mrs. Messiter. When I informed her that the eldest boy had died, and that I was present at his death-bed, Betsy lifted up the corner of her dirty check apron and wiped away a tear. She then left me, saying that now we were beneath the same roof we should have opportunities to converse together. When I had arranged my things in the cupboard, I descended to the sitting-room to see whether my mistress wanted me for anything. I found her by herself, and exceedingly unhappy. Mr. Ward had gone out to renew his endeavour to obtain money. While I was conversing with my mistress, Mrs. Dobson entered the room, saying, "Please, ma'am, here's a hamper from the wine-merchant's up the street—and here's the little bill."

I saw the colour come and go rapidly upon my mistress's countenance as she took the memorandum thus presented to her; and I could but too well guess what was passing in her mind. At the very moment when they were struggling against difficulties and were well nigh penniless, Mr. Ward was persevering in his extravagant mode of living—or rather endeavouring to do so: for it now appeared that he was to receive a check in his career.

"Mr. Ward has gone into the City to see about money-matters," said my mistress to the landlady; "and this must stand over until his return."

"It's only seven pound odd, ma'am," cried Mrs. Dobson, not appearing at all to relish the response she had received; "and the man says that as you are strangers, he of course can't leave the wine without the money."

"This is exceedingly provoking," observed my mistress: and she assuredly felt what she said. "I have not near the sum by me at this moment."

"Well, ma'am," exclaimed the landlady, looking very angry, "this is a respectable house, and I don't like things to be took away from the door, for the neighbours to see that they ain't paid for. I hope you will speak to Mr. Ward on the subject."

"Indeed I shall," ejaculated Melissa with a cer-

tain bitterness in her tone which she had never displayed before during the few weeks I had known her.

The landlady left the room, closing the door somewhat violently; and the loud angry tones in which the wine-merchant's man spoke at the front-door, reached the sitting-room. My mistress was profoundly annoyed—but she said nothing; and of course I made no remark. About an hour afterwards the landlady re-appeared, with the intimation that some poultry had been sent round, and that the person was waiting for payment of the little bill, amounting to eight or nine shillings. This was promptly settled by Mrs. Ward; and when Mrs. Dobson again retired, my mistress said, "I hope that nothing more will come in before Mr. W. returns: for I am at the bottom of my purse—and if it had not been for you, Mary, I should not even have been able to settle that account."

Every time the house-door bell was heard to ring, I saw that my mistress literally trembled with uneasiness, for fear it should be another tradesman waiting for his account; and I am convinced that I felt as deeply as she did the suspense and humiliation of this most awkward position. Presently the heavy tramp of the landlady was heard ascending the stairs; and on entering the room, she said, "If you please, ma'am, I want the money for several little things. There's bread, and groceries, and vegetables, and what not, that you require; and I will just step out and order them—unless indeed you are going out to do it yourself?"

"I am sorry, Mrs. Dobson," answered my mistress, pale and trembling, "that you should be put to any inconvenience on our account: but you must really wait till Mr. Ward returns."

"Then what about dinner, ma'am?" exclaimed the landlady, evidently labouring under sore misgivings respecting the solvency of her new lodgers. "It's a rule here not to run up bills for the people in the house. Mr. Dobson won't allow it: he's a business-like man."

"I have only to say that I can do nothing till Mr. Ward returns. He has gone into the City——"

"Well, we must wait then. But look here, ma'am—Mr. Dobson is a man of business, as I have just said, and if your husband has really got ways and means, he had better put himself into the hands of Mr. D. Here's his circular."

The landlady then quitted the room; and my mistress, after glancing at the prospectus, put it languidly aside, observing, "From what Mr. W. told me when he went out just now, I don't think there will be any need of this person's services."

The weary hours dragged their slow length along; and at about five o'clock there was a long and important knock at the front-door. Melissa thought it was her husband: but it proved to be Mr. Dobson returning from the City. However, a few minutes afterwards Mr. Ward made his appearance; and this time he was perfectly sober—perhaps because he had gone out with no money to expend on liquor. On rushing up into the sitting-room, he exclaimed, "What, isn't dinner ready? And here am I as hungry as a hunter!"

"Have you brought any money?" asked my mistress, with a look of intense anxiety.

"No—I have been disappointed. There's more difficulties in the way than I expected. But I ordered in a lot of things——"

"Yes: but they were not paid for," rejoined Melissa bitterly. "How could you, Walter, think of subjecting me to the degradation I have experienced?"—and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"What the deuce do you mean?" he demanded fiercely.

"The wine you ordered was taken back."

"The scoundrels!—and I found them so civil too! But the poultry?"

"That was paid for: and there is nothing else."

"Well then, why didn't the landlady buy what's wanted and put it down in her bill?"

"It is against the rule of this house. Now, Walter, what is to be done?" asked Mrs. Ward, wiping away her tears and endeavouring to speak with her former tenderness. "I am not hungry myself—I have no appetite: but here is poor Mary, who has had nothing to eat since breakfast at the hotel in the morning——"

Mr. Ward reflected for a few moments, evidently in no very pleasant mood. Suddenly he exclaimed, addressing himself to me, "Well, there is no alternative: you must take my watch to the spout-shop."

A sound like a stifled shriek came from the lips of my mistress: she no doubt felt that this was the crowning humiliation. I should here observe that I would have quitted the room immediately upon my master's return, but that he had remained standing close by the door, on the spot where he had stopped short in dismay on perceiving no signs of dinner. I must confess that I was startled by the abruptness with which he directed me to go to the pawnbroker's, as well as by the coarse levity with which he used a slang term when speaking of it.

"No, no," said Mrs. Ward, ere I had time to utter a word: "you must not ask Mary to do such a thing as this."

"Then I will do it myself," ejaculated my master petulantly: and he whisked out of the room.

"And have I indeed come to this?" said the poor young lady, speaking in the low voice of despair, but wringing her hands as she resumed her seat on the sofa. "Good heavens! what has become of the fine hopes I formed but a few weeks back? Oh, that I could have foreseen all! I begin to think that I have done very wrong—that I have acted very imprudently. If so, my punishment has already commenced with a cruel severity:—and then covering her face with her hands, she sobbed audibly.

I knew not what to say to console her: indeed her prospects appeared to me sufficiently blank. My own position was a most unpleasant one. I felt that mine was an extra mouth to feed and an extra rental to pay, where my master and mistress had no means for paying for themselves. But after what Mrs. Ward had said to me at the hotel, beseeching and imploring me to remain with her, I could not again—at least not immediately—hint my readiness to relieve her of the burden that I knew myself to be. I had experienced many troubles in life—had seen many vicissitudes: but this—with the exception of those of actual horror and personal peril—was one of the most disagreeable of all.

In about ten minutes Mr. Ward returned; and I perceived at a glance that his watch and chain had disappeared. I was about to leave the room, when my mistress said, "Give me a glass of water, Mary—I feel exceedingly faint."

While I was obeying this request, the landlady

made her appearance. Her countenance was as red as fire; and she brought with her an unmistakable odour of ardent spirits.

"Here, Mrs. Dobson, got what you require," said Mr. Ward, throwing down a couple of sovereigns; "and order a bottle of wine and a bottle of brandy. By the bye," he continued, assuming an off-hand manner, "I have heard that some wine came for me to-day."

"Yes, sir—and the wine-merchant's man, seeing you come in, has just stepped round to know whether you will have it sent now?"

"I will call and see about it myself," was the gentleman's reply. "It was too bad of them to treat one like this—just as if one couldn't pay his way!"

"Please, sir," rejoined the landlady, whom the sight of the gold had put into a good humour again, "Mr. Dobson is a man of business—he negotiates loans, obtains discounts, and all that sort of thing—and he says that if you are agreeable, sir, he should be happy to have a little chat with you in the course of the evening."

"Tell him to come up and take a glass of grog with me presently."

The landlady promised that her husband should do so; and I now descended to the kitchen, where I found Betsy attending to the fowls that were roasting for the dinner of my master and mistress.

"Why, I am afraid, Mary, your people are no great shakes," she said. "There's no money—is there?"

"I would rather not talk upon their affairs," said I; and Betsy, somewhat in dudgeon, held her peace.

The dinner was sent up to the parlour; and when the dishes came down again, I was enabled to obtain my own meal. Just as I had finished, Mrs. Dobson entered the kitchen, and observing the best part of one of the fowls left in the dish, she said, "Well, Betsy, I think I can pick a bit now;"—and sitting down, she coolly helped herself to the remnant of the pullet, which she devoured in a very short time. "You see," she observed, addressing herself to me, "Mr. Dobson takes his chop in the City; and I am obliged to get my dinner when I can—so I always wait till the fust floor lodgers have done, and then I take a bit."

I made no answer, but looked grave: for I thought it little less than downright robbery for this woman to self-appropriate her lodgers' victuals.

"You seemed surprised just now, Mary," said Betsy when Mrs. Dobson had quitted the kitchen, "at her taking your people's things; but betwixt you and me, her living don't cost her much—or mine either. Bread, cheese, butter, tea, sugar, milk, vegetables, the remains of the dinners—everything that belongs to the lodgers—all serve in their turn. Ah! maybe you don't know what a lodging-house is: but I do though! Such tricks! Why, would you believe it—when missus came in just now with your master's brandy, she uncorked the bottle, took out a full tumbler, filled the bottle up with water, stuck in a new cork, put some green sealing-wax on the top, stamped it with a halfpenny, and then took it up to the parlour as bold as brass. She didn't do so with the wine, because it's more easy found out. But it's the gin that sho punishes most

when it's sent for! *That* bears water best, because it's got no colour to lose; and she always sends it up half-and-half. You should see her when she's got to buy a lot of things and a five-pound note to do it with. It's precious little change she takes up-stairs again: she doubles the price of everything."

"But all this is very dishonest, Betsy," said I, much disgusted at what I heard.

"Well—dishonest, if you like, after a fashion: but all the world does them kind of things. If I send a loin of mutton or pork to the bake-house, with so many tatars underneath, when it comes back there's always a chop or two gone, and three or four of the tatars. For my part, I don't know who doesn't prig when they have got the chance of doing it. The whole world is full of prigs—and priggings is the order of the day."

The conversation was interrupted by the ringing of my mistress's bed-room bell; and this being a summons for me, I hastened up-stairs. Mrs. Ward was in her chamber; and she said, "Mr. W. has got the landlord with him; and as they wanted to smoke cigars, and I can't bear smoking, I did not choose to prevent them on my account. Mr. W. is telling the man Dobson all about our business; and he is going to make inquiries to-morrow."

I said nothing: my opinion was not asked. If it had been, I should have replied that I had very little faith indeed in Mr. Dobson's ability to raise money. My mistress continued low and desponding; and as her husband and the landlord seemed inclined to prolong their orgie until a late hour, she retired to rest soon after ten—so that I was at liberty to seek my own chamber.

CHAPTER CXII.

DIFFICULTIES.

It appeared from the conference which Mr. Ward and Mr. Dobson had together, that the latter proposed to introduce his lodgers to an attorney of his acquaintance, who would advance money if he saw his way clear. Accordingly, after breakfast in the morning, Mr. and Mrs. Ward set out in a hackney-coach with Mr. Dobson for the solicitor's office in the City; and as it was probable that they would be several hours absent, I was told by my mistress that I might consider my time at my own disposal until the dinner hour. I sat working till about two o'clock in the afternoon, when I put on my things to go and take a little walk. I was bending my steps towards Mrs. Chaplin's, when, as I was traversing Regent Street, I observed a brilliant equipage dashing along. It was an open barouche, drawn by two splendid grays: the coachman and footman were in gorgeous liveries. It was evidently quite a new turn-out; and two or three persons who were near me at the time, gave utterance to ejaculatory remarks of admiration. It was these remarks which made me look towards it; and I wonder that a cry did not escape my lips when I recognized in the occupants of that carriage my sister Sarah and Edgar Selden.

For a few moments I stood speechless: the incident had occurred so suddenly—the recognition was so abrupt—that I was incapable of immediate ac-

tion. But as the equipage was disappearing from my view, I ran after it in a manner that must have made the lookers-on fancy I was mad. I could not overtake it: it dashed down the Quadrant, and disappeared from my sight. Panting for breath, I stopped short and gazed in the direction where I had lost it: but finding myself the object of unpleasant attention on the part of passengers in the street, I crossed over to the other side, and continued my way towards Mrs. Chaplin's. One thing was now certain: Edgar and Sarah were in London. But how could I discover their place of residence? I wanted to ascertain but a single fact—I needed only one assurance: and this was that they were married. I sought not to become a partaker of my sister's prosperity, even though it were honourably and legitimately enjoyed: I was quite content to work for my own living as long as circumstances might compel me. Oh! if Sarah were indeed the lawful wife of Edgar Selden—how rejoiced should I be! These were the reflections which I made while continuing my way to Mrs. Chaplin's. This worthy woman was at home; and I told her what I had seen. Mr. Selden had not been to her house: indeed, he had no reason for going thither—having given up his lodgings there; and this was the first intimation she had received that he was in town. I asked her what advice she could give in respect to discovering his abode: but she was at a loss how to counsel me—and I saw that I must trust to accident to enlighten me on the point. Some friends called in to see Mrs. Chaplin; and I therefore abridged my visit, taking leave of her and returning direct to Poland Street.

Mrs. Ward, having come back alone from the City, was entering the house at the time; and no thought I saw by her looks that she had no very cheering intelligence respecting her own affairs. Such proved to be the case: for when we were together in her bed-chamber, she informed me that the solicitor to whom Mr. Dobson had taken Mr. Ward and herself, had declined advancing any money upon such doubtful security. But she added that Dobson was going to try what he could do elsewhere, and that Mr. Ward had therefore remained in the City with him. They did not return till a late hour in the evening, having taken a chop together—and something else too, judging by my own master's appearance, and from what Betsy subsequently told me in respect to her's.

On the following day I learnt from Mrs. Ward that Dobson could do nothing in the business; and affairs were thus looking darker and darker. The money raised by her husband's watch, speedily disappeared; and her jewellery went next. By these means the first week's rent was paid. Notwithstanding the way in which money was thus raised, Mr. Ward continued to eat and drink of the best; and remaining absent the greater part of the day, he still endeavoured to buoy up his wife with the hope that he should be enabled to raise money on her prospects. At last, when the second week at the lodgings had expired, and it became requisite for all the lady's remaining trinkets to go to the pawnbroker to raise the money for the rent, she seemed so thoroughly unhappy—almost broken-hearted indeed—that I could not help advising her to see Mr. Screwby once more. She could not nerve herself to do this: but she penned an earnest and im-

ploring letter, which she read to me ere she sent it to the post. The following day brought the answer. It was laconic, almost to brutality—telling her that she had nothing to hope nor look for at his hands—that she had chosen her own course, and might follow it—and that if she forwarded him any more letters they would remain unanswered. Bitter indeed were the tears she shed upon receiving this note; and over and over again did she exclaim, "What is to become of us? what are we to do?"

The poor young lady had been married just two months; and during the latter half of the time,—that is to say, since our arrival in London,—she had been more and more neglected by her husband. Despite the folly of her infatuation, she could not help feeling his conduct most keenly. She had striven to make excuses for him: she had done her best to persuade herself that there was no intentional neglect on his part, but that it was the urgency of affairs which kept him so much absent. She had even flattered herself that vexation and annoyance alone induced him to drink more than he ought to do. But it was impossible that these delusions could be longer maintained. Very galling indeed is it for a woman to be compelled to open her eyes to the fact that she is neglected, and that she has thrown herself away upon a worthless character: but terrible is the blow when it is stricken so soon after that marriage-day which is supposed to be the starting point for a career of ineffable bliss. Yet all that humiliation and all that violence of feelings had the unfortunate Melissa to undergo at the time of which I am now writing.

"Mary," she said to me on the day after the second week's rent was paid by the pledging of her remaining jewels,—*"I fear that I am beginning to awaken from a dream. It is sad to have to speak thus: and I do not know that there is another person besides yourself in the whole world to whom I should lay bare the secrets of my heart. But you have been with me since the day of my marriage—Oh! must I designate it a fatal day? Alas, alas—I fear so! It is too cruel to be disabused in so short a time of all my dreams of happiness. But who could have foreknown this? Mary," she continued, in a deeper and more solemn tone, "I thought that he was everything worthy and good: I believed him to be sincere in his vows of affection. What can I think now? But I am determined I will have an explanation with him. He shall not treat me thus any longer. It is more than I can endure: it is a cruelty too intense—too little deserved. When Mr. Ward returns presently, I desire that you do not leave the room."*

"But, my dear madam," I answered, in a tone of remonstrance, "it is not becoming for me to witness any unpleasant scene between husband and wife—especially when I stand in the relation of a domestic towards them."

"Nevertheless, it is my wish. You have seen too much of our circumstances, and I have derived too much solace from your companionship, to treat you as a stranger. Besides, in making up my mind to have an explanation with Mr. Ward, I shall require to be nerved with all my courage; and it would fail me if I were left alone with him. Promise me therefore, my dear Mary, that you will comply with my request."

"I will, ma'am, inasmuch as it is your desire."

The hours passed—the evening came—and between five and six o'clock Mr. Ward made his appearance. He had evidently been drinking freely; and on entering the room, he said somewhat sharply, "Come now, Lissa, ring the bell and let's have up dinner: or you can go down, Mary, and tell Betsy that we are ready."

"Mary will remain here with me for a few minutes, Walter," said my mistress, holding me by the arm as I sat by her side on the sofa. "I am very ill—very unhappy; and I feel the want of the companionship of my own sex. You leave me by myself for hours and hours together every day. Do you never reflect that I have lost all my former friends—all my former acquaintances?—that I have no society now—not a soul to come and cheer me—"

"But, I say," interrupted Mr. Ward, bending a half-tipsy, half-ferocious look upon his wife, "are you going to give me a lecture, and in the presence of the girl too? Come now, you had better mind what you are about: for I am in no humour to put up with any nonsense."

"How unkind, how unfeeling are your remarks, Walter!" exclaimed my poor mistress, the tears streaming down her pale cheeks. "Do you not know how I have loved you? are you unmindful of the sacrifices I have made?"

"Sacrifices be hanged!" interrupted the man, savagely. "What sacrifices have I not made? Linking myself for life to one who I thought was an heiress, but who after all stands the chance of not getting a dump! A fine good-looking chap like me—and such a favourite with the gals too! Why, there was old Bears wax the perfumer's daughter, with three hundred a year certain, that was dying for me: and I might have had her for the asking. But I thought that your thirty thousand pounds was better—and so I took you. And now, what's the consequence? I have thrown myself away as completely as ever a man did in his life. Bother take it—it's enough to drive me mad!"

Mrs. Ward had listened in speechless grief, mingled with consternation, to these unfeeling remarks, the harshness of which was enhanced by the brutal manner in which they were delivered. She heard him on until the end without uttering a word, but gazing with a wild dismay, as if her senses were about to abandon her.

"Oh, recall those dreadful words!" she shrieked forth the moment he had ceased speaking: "do not let me think that I have heard aright! It would be too cruel—too terrible. Oh, Walter—tell me that you love me still—tell me that you have always loved me—tell me that you will be good and kind to me—and I will put up with anything—poverty, solitude—aye, even *want*, if you do not neglect me! But it is your neglect that I cannot possibly endure!"—and she spoke with a depth of feeling and a passionate vehemence which I had scarcely fancied her capable of either experiencing or displaying.

"Neglect!" ejaculated the husband, who seemed by no means unwilling to pick a quarrel, and therefore caught up the readiest word to form a string to be harped upon for the purpose: "what do you mean by saying I treat you with neglect? It is no such thing. I am out all day long trying to raise money. Have you got any money to give me—that's all? If not, why do you blow up because I am out look-

ing after it? Talk of neglect indeed! What the deuce have I got to make my home comfortable? Here I ought to be having a fine house, plenty of servants—horses, carriages, and all that sort of thing: but instead of it, here I am cooped up in a beggarly lodging. And what's more, my creditors—"

"Your creditors?" echoed the unhappy young lady, who, after being stricken with despair at the unfeeling language he was using, was now startled into a wild affright by the ominous allusion which had just fallen from her husband's lips.

"Well, my creditors then—if you *must* know it. I was over head and ears in debt when I was fool enough to bolt away with you; and not a shilling have I got to pay the cormorants with. That they will find me out soon there can't be a doubt: and then you will see me locked up and taken off to quod."

A shriek burst from Mrs. Ward's lips—and she fainted. I hastened to sprinkle water upon her countenance, and did my best to restore her, while Mr. Ward flung himself upon a seat, and stretched out his legs, muttering "Ah! it's all very fine—women can get up a cry or tumble into a fit when they choose. They think it uncommon sentimental: but I don't."

"When you were at Carlisle, sir," I said, very sharply, "you assisted me to recover Mrs. Ward, when she fainted at her uncle's appearance."

"Ah! I thought she had thirty thousand pounds, *then*," was his brutal response: "but I now find that she won't have a mag. So that alters the case."

My mistress slowly recovered; and when she was sufficiently restored to speak, she said, "You can leave me now, Mary. You are a good girl—and I never shall be able to repay your kindness."

"Tell them to bring up dinner," exclaimed Mr. Ward, as I was about to leave the room.

After this scene, I saw full well that the last remaining hope of happiness for my poor mistress was destroyed—and that her husband having revealed himself in his true colours, she could not even cherish the thought that he might still amend. Every day, during the week which followed, he remained out as usual from breakfast-time till dinner, not troubling himself how either breakfast or dinner was to be provided at all. His wife, not choosing to ask me to perform such a service for her, got Betsy to take things to the pawnbroker's, and charged her to be secret with regard to these proceedings. But Betsy was not one who could hold her tongue with regard to such matters; and she therefore always whispered them to me, though I gave her no encouragement to be thus communicative. At length the day came round again for the third payment of the weekly rent. Mrs. Dobson was in the habit of making out a little bill, in which she put down the money for coals, firewood, milk, and any such little odd trifles that she herself paid for; and she was wont to give me this bill to take up into the sitting-room when my master and mistress were at breakfast. On the present occasion I took up the bill as usual; and having handed it to my master, was about to leave the room, when he bade me stop.

"I say, Mary," he exclaimed, "something has struck me. You were in service at Alderman Bull's; and from what I have since heard, the old



man used to speak uncommon well of you. Would you have any objection to go to him yourself, with a letter that I have asked Mrs. W. to write?"

"I did not say I would write it, Walter," observed my mistress, meekly and submissively. "I really cannot. I have no claim upon Mr. Bull—I know very little of him——"

"But I say you shall write it!" ejaculated her husband fiercely. "He can't refuse to lend you such a paltry sum as twenty pounds."

"But he *will* refuse," said Mrs. Ward, in anguished earnestness; "and I do not wish to subject myself to such a humiliation."

"Humiliation indeed! It will be a precious deal worse humiliation to be bundled out of these lodgings—which we shall be presently: for the Dobsons won't give us credit for a day. That's the worst of having let Dobson interfere in our affairs. He knows everything, and sees how we are circumstanced. If you will only write to old

Bull, I dare say Mary will go. Come, be quick about it. Now don't look glum like that—or else, by Jove, if I once leave the house on account of your refusal, I won't come back in a hurry."

Terrified by this threat, Mrs. Ward wrote the letter according to her husband's desire: but she evidently did so with very great reluctance. It appeared to be taken for granted that I should have no objection to become the bearer of the letter: and yet it was a commission which I by no means admired. It naturally occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Bull was aware that it was my brother with whom one of his daughters had eloped; and if so, it was to be expected that he would visit his wrath upon me. However, I entertained so profound a commiseration for my poor mistress, that I was prepared to subject myself to the chance of any annoyance or humiliation in the hope of doing her a service: and therefore I undertook to become the bearer of the letter.

"You must take a hackney-coach, Mary," said Mr. Ward, "and be back as quick as you can: for I shan't go out till you return."

I accordingly set out—and in due time was conveyed into the well-known quarter in which Mr. Bull's habitation was situated. The hackney-coach drew up in front of the dingy dark-red brick house, with its narrow windows; and when I knocked at the door, it was opened by a footman in gorgeous livery. To my inquiry whether Mr. Bull was at home, the man replied in a pompous tone that "the Alderman was in doors and *might* be disengaged:"—and then he asked what name he should announce?

"Will you be pleased to give Mr. Bull this letter," said I, "and tell him that Mary Price, who was once in his service, is waiting for the answer."

The footman stared at me for a few moments, he evidently having heard of me before; and then he entered the parlour on the ground-floor. Re-appearing in about a minute, he said, "You can walk in." I accordingly passed into the well-remembered room, not a single feature of which was altered. The Alderman was sitting or rather half-reclining in an easy-chair, with one leg so bandaged up that it seemed as large as that of an elephant, and was supported upon a gout-stool covered with green baize. He had grown so corpulent that it appeared to me a matter of doubt whether he could walk at all, even if he were not afflicted with the gout. Mrs. Bull was reclining on a sofa. Her nose, which was exceedingly red when I was in her service, was now absolutely flaming: her complexion looked more unwholesome than ever; and her face was not merely pimply, but covered with blotches. When I entered, Mr. Bull, with his spectacles upon his nose, was reading the letter; and just looking up for a moment at me, he continued the perusal, muttering and grumbling to himself the whole time.

"Well, Mary," said Mrs. Alderman Bull, in a languid manner, but not at all in an uncivil mood; "so you have come to see us at last? Ah! I have enjoyed dreadful bad health since you were here: these spasms will be the death of me. Reach me my medicine-bottle, there's a good girl!"—and she made a horrible grimace while she spoke, as if she really felt most unpleasant pains in the region of the stomach. "There, now! See what good it has done me!" she cried, after partaking of a large dose of the bottle's contents. "Did I ever tell you what a wonderfully clever doctor it was who gave me this prescription? I have recommended it to a great many genteel people of our acquaintance; and they all approve of it. You remember Mrs. Pugstiles, and how the Alderman lost his vote through Master Theodore upsetting a glass of Port wine over her crimson velvet dress? Well, Mrs. Pugstiles and I didn't speak for six months after that—until I heard she was very ill with the spasms: so I sent her a bottle of my medicine, and she came next day in her carriage to thank me for it. Talking of carriages, puts me in mind, Mary, that we keep our's now. And it's not through pride, but only because I know you take an interest in us, that I also inform you that we don't live habitually here now: we have a beautiful country-house at Clapham. Only the Alderman stays here when it's his week to attend at Guildhall; and the last time, he was seized with such a fit of the gout that he has been

obliged to stay here ever since. But, dear me, what a sudden pain I have got shooting through my head!"

The medicine bottle was forthwith put into requisition again; and the lady, having swallowed a dose, affirmed that she was cured in a moment.

"You see, we have made some changes in our establishment since you were here," she resumed. "We do as all genteel people do; and therefore we have got a butler and livery-servants. I once had a prejudice against them: but I rather like them now. Ah! and there have been other changes too," she added; but methought with a certain malicious satisfaction.

"Why, of course Mary Price knows all about it," the Alderman now broke in with a grumbling tone. "Wasn't she at Carlisle? and didn't Screwby see her there?"

"Ah, to be sure! I forgot all about it," said Mrs. Bull. "My memory is getting so bad! But there is nothing like the medicine to refresh it:"—and she accordingly took another dose, being the third within the quarter of an hour that I had now been in the room.

"There! read this letter!" exclaimed the Alderman, passing the document to his wife; "and you will see what Melissa has come to. Serves her right! But she won't get a penny from me. By the bye, Mary, I have learnt that the young woman who once was called Lydia Bull—for she is no longer a daughter of mine—married a young man named Price. Is he any relation of your's?"

"He is my brother, sir," was my answer.

"Just as I thought—just as Screwby thought too. And pray, what had you got to do with that precious piece of business?"

"Nothing, sir—most solemnly I assure you!"

"That's enough—I thought you hadn't, from what Screwby heard at Carlisle. But we won't say any more on that point. And so Melissa and her husband—that is to say, Mr. and Mrs. Ward—are in great distress, are they?"

"I presume, sir, that the letter you have just read, has given you the fullest information?"

"They can't pay their lodgings—and yet they keep a lady's-maid. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. When I began life as an errand-boy in a warehouse——"

"Hush, hush, Mr. Bull!" exclaimed his wife.

"What are you talking about? Pray recollect that you are an alderman of the City of London, and have got a certain dignity to keep up!"

"Yes—and I have got the gout through it. Just draw up that blind a little, Mary. That's too high. And now you have put it too low. That will do," he added hastily. "I am sorry to see you in the service of these people. I suppose Mrs. Ward is heartily sick of her marriage?"

"I regret to say, sir, that her husband is not very kind to her; and it would be a great act of benevolence on your part if you would comply with the request made in that letter."

"Oh, no! the Alderman can't think of such a thing!" cried Mrs. Bull. "My cousin Melissa was never a favourite of mine; and I know that *she* didn't like *me*. It is therefore quite preposterous to send to us for money. I am sure if the Alderman has discarded his own daughters—which he has done on *my* representations—he is not likely to fling

away his money upon a young woman not having the slightest claim upon him. Oh, dear me, no! It can't be thought of for a moment!"

"Just because you have said that," grumbled the Alderman, "I have a very great mind to do it."

"Indeed you shall not, Mr. Bull!" cried the lady angrily. "If you don't do as I wish, I will go off to Clapham this very day, and leave you here to shift for yourself. Then, who will see that your turtle-soup is nicely made, and your venison roasted to a turn? I know a great many genteel families where the mistress of the house never goes into the kitchen at all; and if I do so, it is on purpose to see that you have your meals served up in a proper manner. In return, therefore," added the lady, "I deserve some little consideration."

"Well, well, my dear—you shall have your own way," said Mr. Bull, who, having become gouty and helpless, had evidently sunk down as completely into the henpecked husband as poor Mr. Twisden of Twisden Lodge.

"You may tell Mrs. Ward," resumed the Alderman's wife, putting on a stately air, "that in consequence of my husband's high civic position, he is more than ever compelled to set an example of strict morality to the citizens of London in particular, and to the whole world in general; and that if he were to comply with the present request, it would be encouraging young women to fly in the face of their relatives and friends, and elope in shoals to Gretna-Green. That's the answer you have to take back. But we are not angry with you, Mary; and if you like to go down into the servants'-room and take some refreshments——"

"I would rather not, I thank you, ma'am. But I should like to see the children."

"Oh, they are at Clapham!" ejaculated the lady. "But if ever you are in that neighbourhood, you are quite welcome to look in. Everybody will tell you which is Alderman Bull's house. Just ask for Magog Lodge——You see, we call it after one of the giants in Guildhall; and next summer we are going to take a dwelling by the sea-side, which we have decided upon calling Gog House. Once upon a time I liked nothing connected with the City: but since Mr. Bull has become an Alderman, and will be Lord Mayor in his turn, it of course alters the case. Besides, I have found out that there are a great many very genteel people in the City—though of course all of them have carriages and country-houses. We don't associate with anybody except carriage-people now."

"Will you not alter your decision, sir," I said, "in respect to this poor lady?"

"Oh, no! it is out of the question!" cried Mrs. Bull, not giving her husband time to answer. "The bare idea of it gives me a cruel attack of spasms;"—and again was the medicine-bottle had recourse to.

"No, Mary," said the Alderman, evidently fearing to go against his wife's resolve: "I am compelled to refuse."

"I am sorry that I should have intruded," said I; and thereupon I took my departure.

I was about to enter the hackney-coach, when an ejaculation of surprise uttered near me, made me turn my head; and I beheld Mr. Appleton, the

uncle of that lady who had married the self-styled Count de Montville.

"Hum! so this is really you—eh, Mary?" he said. "Well, I am truly glad to see you. But how is it that you are in London without giving me a call? Did I not ask you to do so? and did I not give you my card on purpose? You ought to have known that it was not a mere matter of words on my part. I should have been very glad to see you: and I *am* very glad to see you now."

Thus speaking, the worthy old gentleman shook me by the hand; and I noticed that instead of being dressed in a snuff-coloured coat, drab small-clothes, and gaiters, he was in complete black,—the crape round his hat showing that he was in mourning.

"May I ask," said I—but in a hesitating manner, for the suspicion of wherefore he wore this mourning garb had flashed to my mind in a moment,—"may I ask, sir, after your niece—my late mistress?"

Mr. Appleton shook his head mournfully; and my suspicion was confirmed.

"She is gone," he said: "she never recovered the blow she received at Ashford. It is now six months since she died, literally of a broken heart!"—and the old gentleman wiped the tears from his eyes.

"I am truly grieved to hear this," said I, the tears likewise trickling down my own cheeks.

"I knew you would be sorry; for you are a real good girl," exclaimed Mr. Appleton. "The children are with me—I behave as a father to them; and though the villain swallowed up all the mother's property, yet the poor orphans shall be rich. I have often thought of you, Mary; and the children have frequently spoken of you—always with kindness. They will be delighted to see you. I am going to take them out of town presently for a week: but if you are remaining in London, and will come and see them in a few days, you may reckon on a welcome reception. By the bye," he added, lowering his voice, "business took me to Guernsey a few weeks ago—and I heard of the suicide of that villain. It was to be expected that he would terminate his career in some such manner."

I could have told Mr. Appleton that, had it not been through me, he would have married another victim; and that as it was, he had been the cause of consigning a young and beautiful creature to a madhouse. But the secret was a sacred one—and I did not violate it.

"Before her death," resumed Mr. Appleton, "my niece spoke often and most kindly of you. She hoped that you were doing well; and she expressed her confidence that if your success in the world depended on your good conduct, it was certain. Such also is my opinion. Tell me, Mary—are you comfortable in your circumstances?—though I think I need scarcely ask," he added; for I was neatly dressed—and moreover there was a hackney-coach waiting for me.

"To tell you the truth, sir," I answered—for I liked the old gentleman, and he spoke to me with a sort of paternal kindness, so that I did not mind addressing him frankly; "I am not very comfortably situated at this moment. I am in a place, it is true; but my master and mistress are so embarrassed in their circumstances, that they ought not to

keep me. Indeed, it is only for the poor lady's sake that I remain where I am. She is very unhappy—and finds a solace in my companionship.”

“Hum! I am sorry to hear that you are thus situated. From what you have just said it won't last long. You will have to leave. If you find any difficulty in getting a place, let me know. Perhaps amongst my acquaintances I could recommend you. And now, Mary, you must not be angry with me if I insist upon your taking this. Do what you like with it—lend it to your poor mistress—but you must take it.”

As he thus spoke, the old gentleman whisked something out of his waistcoat-pocket, and thrust it into my hand with such rapidity that I had not time to utter a word of remonstrance. He then sped away with such precipitation that before I could recover from the confusion into which the suddenness of the proceeding had thrown me, he was out of sight. I entered the hackney-coach, and ordered the driver to take me back to Poland Street.

It was a twenty pound note which Mr. Appleton had thus thrust into my hand; and when I recollected the failure of my mission to Alderman Bull, and the terrible dilemma in which my mistress was left at home, I regarded this money as a godsend to be devoted to her service. And here I must inform the reader that had Mrs. Ward alone been concerned, I would long ere this have parted with my own personal property in order to assist her in her pecuniary troubles—particularly when I learnt from Betsy that she was day by day making away with the contents of her own-boxes. But I had abstained from rendering any such succour, because I did not choose to dispossess myself of my little valuables—especially as they were gifts from esteemed persons—for the sake of providing Mr. Ward with the means of extravagant living.

The hackney-coach had reached Oxford Street, and was just turning into Poland Street, when my eye suddenly caught that brilliant equipage in which I had seen Edgar Selden and my sister whirled along three weeks back.

CHAPTER CXIII.

MY SISTER.

THE carriage was standing in front of a jeweller's shop on the side of the way opposite to that whence Poland Street diverged. I pulled the check-string of the hackney-coach, my first impulse being to alight and go and accost my sister in the shop, should she be there: but fearful of an angry scene, my second thought was to follow the equipage and thus ascertain where she and Mr. Selden dwelt. This latter instruction I accordingly gave the driver of the hackney-coach; and scarcely had I done so, when I beheld Edgar Selden and Sarah emerge from the shop. She was splendidly dressed, and was laughing and chattering gaily with her companion, as he handed her into the carriage. It then drove away, the hackney-coach following. I feared lest the lumbering old vehicle, with its two miserable apologies for horses, would not be enabled to keep within view of that dashing equipage with its pair of splendid grays: but fortunately the latter proceeded more slowly than I had expected—while the former went

faster. Nor was the pursuit a long one: for the brilliant equipage turned up Langham Place, and thence into Margaret Street, Cavendish Square, where it stopped. The hackney-coach pulled up at the corner; and for a moment I deliberated whether I should proceed at once to obtain an interview with my sister, or postpone it until after I had been to Poland Street. I decided upon this latter course, as I knew the anxiety with which Mrs. Ward would be awaiting my return. I saw Edgar Selden and my sister alight from the equipage, which then moved slowly away, while they entered the house; and thus I felt assured that it was their residence—or else if they were merely making a call, the carriage would have stopped for them.

I now returned to Poland Street; and dismissing the hackney-coach, ascended to the sitting-room, where Mr. Ward was drinking cold brandy-and-water, and his wife was evidently a prey to the most nervous anxiety. This feeling was betrayed in the rapid look which she threw upon me as I entered the room; and the moment I made my appearance Mr. Ward exclaimed, “Well, Mary—what luck?”

“I saw Mr. and Mrs. Bull,” was my answer, “and they declined compliance with the request contained in the letter. But nevertheless, I have some money,” I made haste to observe: for my poor mistress had already clasped her hands in a despairing manner.

“That's capital, at all events!” ejaculated Mr. Ward. “How much is it? and where did you get it?”

“The sum is twenty pounds——”

“Then hand it over!” cried my master, springing up from his seat with joy upon his half-tipsy countenance.

“No, sir,” I replied firmly: “it is not your money.”

“Oh! that's all nonsense. I am sure you got it from the Alderman; and it's only an excuse of your's to give it to your mistress.”

“I am incapable of telling you an untruth, sir,” I exclaimed, throwing upon him an indignant look. “You are at perfect liberty to inquire from Alderman Bull what answer he gave to the letter.”

“Then you must have borrowed the money somewhere in my name,” cried Mr. Ward, in a towering rage; “and therefore you had better give it to me at once.”

“I did not borrow it at all—and I shall not give it to you. The explanation is this, ma'am,” I continued, turning round to address myself to my mistress. “I met a gentleman—the uncle of a lady in whose service I once was—and he made me a present of this amount. I frankly told him that I was now in a situation with a lady and gentleman who were somewhat embarrassed; and he, while giving me the money, bade me dispose of it as I thought fit. Therefore, ma'am, if you will please to accept the use of this sum, it is entirely at your service.”

“Oh, yes—we will borrow it of you, Mary,” exclaimed Mr. Ward. “Give it me, there's a good girl. You know I keep the purse, and Mrs. W. does not like to be troubled with money-matters.”

“Here it is, ma'am,” I said, taking no notice of my master's observation.

“I cannot think of taking your money thus,” replied Mrs. Ward, bending upon me a look full of

gratitude. "I do not mind borrowing two or three pounds for immediate use: but even those I shall accept with hesitation—for heaven knows when we may be enabled to repay you!"

"What nonsense!" ejaculated her husband. "Take what Mary offers you."

"Yes—I most sincerely hope you will, ma'am:—and I forced the bank-note upon her."

"Give it to me, and I will go out and change it," said Mr. Ward, advancing towards his wife.

"No, Walter!" she exclaimed, with a firmness which I was delighted to behold her display. "Through the unparalleled kindness and generosity of this excellent young woman, we are now relieved from immediate want; and I am determined that this money shall be expended with the utmost economy."

Thus speaking, she rang the bell. Mr. Ward gave vent to a bitter imprecation, looking daggers both at me and his wife: but he was compelled to curb his rage, as Mrs. Dobson almost immediately made her appearance.

"Will you have the kindness to procure change for this note," said my mistress, "and pay yourself what is due. I will thank you to give the residue into my hand," she added with a look of intelligence.

"To be sure, ma'am," responded the landlady, her red face brightening up at the appearance of the bank-note.

She then quitted the room; and while she was absent, Mr. Ward mixed himself another glass of brandy-and-water, which he completely disposed of by the time she returned. During the interval of five minutes which thus elapsed, he said nothing: but I feared that poor Melissa would have to pass through some unpleasant and violent scenes with her husband if she adhered to the resolution (which I hoped she would) of being purse-holder for the future. Mrs. Dobson duly counted down the balance of the bank-note, after deducting her own bill; and Mrs. Ward put the money into her pocket.

"I regret," she said to the landlady, "that our circumstances should be such as to render it impossible for us to retain such expensive apartments as these. I therefore beg that you will accept this intimation that we shall leave at the expiration of a week."

"Well, I'm sure, ma'am, you won't get cheaper rooms anywhere," cried Mrs. Dobson: "leastways nothing so genteel or comfortable."

"I am compelled to give you this notice," said Mrs. Ward firmly: and the landlady, seeing that she was resolved, quitted the room.

I now informed my mistress that I had accidentally discovered the abode of those whom I had sought at Gretna-Green; and I requested permission to absent myself for an hour or two. This was most kindly accorded; and again did Mrs. Ward express her thanks in fervid terms for the pecuniary service I had rendered her. Issuing forth from the house, I bent my way towards Margaret Street. It was now nearly three o'clock in the afternoon: for the reader must remember that I was detained in the City a considerable time. On reaching the house at which I had seen my sister and Mr. Selden alight, I glanced up at the windows, and perceived that the draperies were of an elegant description, thus affording an idea of the splendour

of the interior. A livery-servant answered my summons at the front door; and I inquired if Mrs. Selden was at home? Oh, how sincerely I hoped that she had a just and lawful right to that name!—but my heart palpitated violently and painfully with acute suspense.

"Yes, Miss," was the reply given by the domestic to my query: and I saw that he regarded me very attentively, no doubt struck by the family likeness which must have made him suspect who I was.

I entered the house. It was a handsome hall into which I was thus admitted; and the livery-servant conducted me up a well carpeted staircase to the landing on the first floor. Everything was new, thus showing that the house had only been very recently furnished.

"What name shall I announce?" asked the man, pausing at a door with his fingers upon the handle.

"I am Mrs. Selden's sister," was my response: whereupon the door was at once thrown open, and I advanced into a magnificently-furnished drawing-room, where I found Sarah reclining negligently upon a sofa with a beautifully bound book in her hand, while Edgar Selden was lounging upon another. The latter uttered an ejaculation of annoyance as much as of surprise on beholding me: but Sarah, without manifesting much emotion of any kind, said, "Ah, Mary! is that you?"—and she extended her hand.

I glanced round to see that the footman had withdrawn: and then accosting my sister, I said in a solemn voice, "Sarah, am I to congratulate you upon legally and rightfully bearing this gentleman's name?"

I looked towards Mr. Selden for a moment as I thus alluded to him: and then my eyes were instantaneously reverted upon my sister, whose countenance flushed with a tell-tale glow which rendered a verbal response from her lips unnecessary. A moan escaped from mine—a dizziness seized upon me—and I sank upon a chair to save myself from falling.

"Well, really I think, Mary," exclaimed Sarah, adopting a tone and look of reproach as the best means of anticipating mine; "I think this is a strange way for you to introduce yourself here."

"Oh! make your sister welcome," ejaculated Edgar: "she is overcome by her feelings. I will ring for some wine."

"No, sir," I said: "I thank you—but I require nothing:"—and I felt that I must have been as white as a sheet. Indeed, I experienced such a wretched sensation that I could have screamed out in my crucifying anguish.

"Come, Mary, don't make yourself miserable," my sister resumed: "for I can assure you that you find me so happy, it would be a perfect sin to say or do anything to distress me."

"O Sarah!" I exclaimed; "if you are indeed a wife, you would be but too proud as well as willing to give me the proof of it!"

"Mary, I cannot permit you to talk to me in this style," said my sister, with a flush again suffusing her countenance: and at the same time she frowned and drew herself up in a stately manner upon the sofa. "You ought to rejoice to see me thus happy with him whom I love, and surrounded by every comfort and luxury."

"Mr. Selden," I said, turning towards that gentleman, and looking him full in the face,—“if, as I have every reason to suspect and dread, you have beguiled my sister from the path of duty—and if you have not yet bestowed upon her the legitimate title of your wife—I implore and entreat that you will not delay this reparation and this atonement. Promise your assent—and I will go down upon my knees to thank you! But if you refuse, rest assured that, much as you may scorn and despise my threat, heaven's vengeance will yet alight upon your head!”

For the first few moments that I was thus speaking, Mr. Selden appeared confused and even distressed: but speedily recovering his wonted superciliousness of look, together with his free-and-easy flippancy of manner, he said when I had finished, “Pon my word, Mary, you talk in a very strange style; and I don't mind taking the trouble to argue the point. Your sister has told you that she is happy with me; and your eyes may convince you that she is surrounded by all the luxuries of life. What more can be wanted?”

“The legitimate title to the enjoyment of this position,” was my answer, solemnly given.

“But if your sister and I,” exclaimed Selden, “came to the understanding that it would be useless to pass through mere cold ceremonies and idle forms——”

“If, sir, it be by such detestable sophistries as these,” I exclaimed, my blood suddenly boiling with indignation, “that you have beguiled my sister from the path of virtue, there can indeed be little hope that you will do her the justice I demand. And yet will I make one more appeal. Reflect, Mr. Selden—she is an orphan——”

“I wish, Mary, you would leave off this silly nonsense,” interrupted Sarah, starting from her seat. “I do not meddle with you or your proceedings; and I will thank you not to dictate in respect to me or mine.”

“This language from you?” I said, gazing upon Sarah in mournful compassion. “Oh, my dear sister, is it possible that you have forgotten all those teachings which our dear mother imparted? Instead of adopting this bold effrontery, Sarah—instead of taunting me because I do my duty towards you—rather should you fall down and kneel by my side, that we may mingle our entreaties in the presence of him who holds your destiny in his hand. Mr. Selden, you say that you love my sister—and I know that she loves you in return. For heaven's sake, let this mutual love of your's be hallowed and sanctified!”

“This is really too strong, Mary,” cried Mr. Selden angrily. “If you came in a friendly spirit, you would be welcome enough; but you have no right to intrude here to lecture us in this manner.”

“Do *you*, Sarah, consider my presence to be an intrusion?” I asked, turning my tearful eyes upon my sister.

“While you talk in this way, I do,” she responded with unfeeling coldness.

“Then I will depart at once,” said I: and my heart swelled with the most painful feelings. “I go, Sarah; but if circumstances should change with you, and if you need a friend—a true friend—one who will receive you with open arms, give you the best advice, and mingle her tears with yours in

atonement for your error—do not forget that you possess a sister! Should you not know where to find me, William can always give you that information. Ah, Sarah! how afflicted will poor William be when he knows the worst. And had you forgotten, too, that you possessed a sister younger than yourself—and who though too young now to understand the meaning of what you have done, will nevertheless in a few years' time be old enough to ask wherefore her sister Sarah's name is mentioned in a subdued tone and with mournful looks by William and myself? Sarah, have you nothing more to say to me?—are we to part thus?”

For a moment I thought that the erring girl was touched by the manner in which I addressed her; for her countenance changed, her lips quivered, and she threw an anxious glance towards Selden. But that state of good feeling lasted only for a moment; and resuming the bold hardihood of her looks, my sister said, when I had concluded, “It is your own fault, Mary, if we part so unpleasantly.”

I saw that it was useless to urge any farther remonstrance—useless also to renew any entreaties to Mr. Selden—and useless therefore for me to remain where I was considered as an intruder. My heart was full almost to bursting. I longed to throw my arms around Sarah's neck and embrace her, notwithstanding her fault: but I dared not! No—I dared not thus in a moment of weakness appear to give the slightest sanction to the false position in which she was placed. Bending upon her one last look—a look that must have been full of an indescribable sadness—I moved towards the door. No word was spoken to detain me: no hand was outstretched to keep me back.

“Be kind to her—for God's sake be kind to her!” I said, in a voice half suffocated with sobs, as I flung a glance at Mr. Selden: and then I quitted the room. On the landing I paused to wipe my eyes, and so far compose my feelings as to avoid affording an indication to the domestic that any unpleasant scene had occurred: but it was a hard struggle to subdue a passionate outburst of grief. I however succeeded; and descending the sumptuous staircase, found the liveried lacquey in the hall ready to open the front door for me, the drawing-room bell having been rung for the purpose. I noticed that the footman looked very hard at me, as if he suspected something of the truth, or else really knew the position in which my sister stood with regard to Mr. Selden; and this thought gave an added poignancy to my tortured feelings.

As I passed along the street, I cried bitterly; and although it was broad daylight—but little more than four o'clock on an autumn afternoon—I was constrained to lean for support against the iron railings of one of the houses. I saw myself the object of notice with two or three persons who were passing; and thus recalled to a sense of my position, I hurried onwards. By the time I reached Poland Street, I had so far surmounted that little paroxysm of anguish as to be enabled to assume a certain degree of outward composure. As I rang at the house-bell for Betsy to let me in, a man came up at the moment, and said, “Please, Miss, do you happen to know whether Mr. Ward lives here?”

“Yes,” said I; “he does.”—and scarcely had I given the answer, when I was struck by the repulsive appearance of the individual. He was a very

shabbily dressed man, of middle age, and smelt horribly of drink. The moment I had spoken, he glanced over his shoulder; and another man, who was waiting at a short distance, hastily approached. This new-comer presented a strong contrast, so far as apparel went, to the first-mentioned person. He was dressed in a flashy style—had a cut-away sporting coat, with metal buttons—a blue checked neck-tie, and a profusion of jewellery of a glaring description. By the peculiarity of his facial outline he was evidently a member of the Hebrew race; and when I say that his appearance was far from prepossessing, it is in no disparagement of the Jews generally—for I have encountered many excellent persons of the Israelite persuasion.

"Mr. Ward *does* live here," said the shabby man, addressing himself to the Jewish individual.

"That's all right," exclaimed the latter. "We have got a little matter of business to speak to him about," he continued, addressing himself to me:—"some money affairs—and I know he will be very glad to see us."

At this moment the door was opened by Betsy, who started to see me in the company of these two men. I speedily gave her to understand that they wished to see Mr. Ward; whereupon she made a face which enhanced a certain misgiving that had already sprung up in my own mind. The two men pushed their way with considerable rudeness into the passage; and the Jewish individual said to Betsy, "Which room? First floor, I suppose?"—and receiving no answer from her, he coolly ascended the stairs, followed by his man—while I brought up the rear.

On reaching the landing, these visitors did not knock at the door of the front room; but threw it wide open, and walked in. I heard an ejaculation—or I should rather say, an imprecation—from Mr. Ward's lips, accompanied by a faint scream from those of his wife: so that I had no longer any doubt of the unpleasant nature of this visit. I entered the room; and Mr. Ward at once exclaimed fiercely, "By Jove, Mary, you have sold me!"

"You needn't blame the young woman," said the Hebrew visitor: "she had nothing to do with it. Of course you know who I am, and what I come for. My name's Malachi Grabbemori. Here's a writ for eighty-seven pounds at the suit of Smith, Smithson, and Smithers; and so you must come along with me. Jack, keep the door."

The glance which, on entering, I threw upon Mrs. Ward, showed me that she had been crying; and I therefore concluded that there had been some terrible scene during my absence, in respect to the money. But now, she forgot whatever had passed. She forgot likewise all the cruelty, neglect, and ill-treatment which in so short a space of time she had received from her husband; and she was overwhelmed with grief at the misfortune which had just overtaken him.

"Well, there is no help for it," he said, at length making up his mind to put an air of reckless indifference upon the matter. "I must go to quod: but I will very soon have a whitewashing-business at the Insolvents' Court."

"I suppose you will come to my house in Chancery Lane?" said the Sheriff's officer—for such the Jewish gentleman was. "Jack, I think you had better run and get a hackney-coach."

The follower accordingly quitted the room; and Mr. Ward invited the Sheriff's officer to sit down with him and take some brandy-and-water—an invitation that was at once accepted. Mrs. Ward beckoned me to accompany her up-stairs to her chamber: on reaching which, she was for a while so convulsed with grief as to be unable to utter a word. It likewise seemed impossible to console her. Indeed, misfortunes had come so quickly and so thickly upon this unhappy young lady—striking her blow upon blow—that it was no wonder if she were well nigh crushed by them. Doubtless, in that moment of her supreme anguish, her thoughts were reflected back to the time when she had a happy home and was unacquainted with those dire calamities which had attended her marriage-career; and doubtless likewise she must have bitterly repented the step she had taken in thus throwing herself away upon a worthless character.

When the paroxysm of anguish was over, she recovered the fortitude sufficient to encounter this last and crowning calamity: and she addressed me in serious but profoundly mournful accents.

"My dear Mary," she said, "the time has come for us to part. I am going with my husband to a prison; and I cannot ask you to attach yourself to my hopeless fortunes any longer. Besides, it would be a mockery as well as a wickedness on my part to keep any one to attend upon me in my present circumstances. I should not have kept you so long, Mary—but you have been a companion to me: nay, more—you have been a friend."

Mrs. Ward ceased for a few instants, her voice being choked with the intensity of her feelings. Oh, how sincerely did I sympathize with the poor lady!—how deeply did I compassionate her!

"You must take back all that remains of this money of your's, Mary," she resumed, drawing forth her purse. "And, ah! terrible was the scene that took place just now, while you were absent. But I must not think of that. This is the time to forget and forgive whatsoever cruel taunts and frightful menaces my husband threw out against me."

"Mrs. Ward," I said, with tears in my eyes, "not one shilling of that money will I touch. Would to heaven that I had more to place at your disposal!"

"But what will you do, Mary? This is really too generous on your part. At least you must take some portion of the amount."

"Not one single farthing, my dear madam!" was my emphatic rejoinder. "I am not without friends in London."

"God be thanked that you have friends, Mary! But such a being as you are, could not fail to make them wherever you go. Ah, do not think me so light and frivolous that I am unable to appreciate all that is excellent in your character!—and if ever fortune should take a turn with me, so that I may have an opportunity of testifying my regard, it will be most sincerely shown."

I wept while my mistress was thus speaking: for in spite of many faults she evidently possessed a good heart. She embraced me when we parted; and the tears continued to rain down my cheeks, as from the window of that chamber I beheld the departure of the hackney-coach which bore her away with her husband and the sheriff's-officers to the lock-up house in Chancery Lane.

"There! I thought this would be the end of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Dobson, as she came up into the room. "I never had such people in the house before, and hope I shall never have such again."

"Their misfortunes deserve some commiseration," said I, in a tone of rebuke: "at least those which have thus cruelly overtaken that unhappy young lady."

I packed up my boxes; and intimating that I should send for them in the course of the evening, bade Betsy good bye, and proceeded to Mrs. Chaplin's to inquire if she could accommodate me with a lodging for a few days. The worthy woman bade me welcome: a porter was sent to fetch my luggage—and I found myself duly installed in a comfortable little chamber in Conduit Street. But wherefore did I remain in London? Because my resources were so limited that if I had decided upon travelling into Kent, I should have had to make away with some of my little property—an alternative from which I shrank; and I felt tolerably certain that through Mr. Appleton's agency I should soon obtain another situation. But this was not my only reason for lingering in the metropolis. I could not make up my mind to leave it without endeavouring to see Sarah once again—although the hope that I entertained of separating her from Mr. Selden, or of inducing him to lead her to the altar, was slight and shadowy indeed.

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE KING'S BENCH.

MR. APPLETON had told me that he should be absent from town for a few days; and I accordingly suffered a week to elapse ere I called at his residence. When I did proceed thither he had just returned from the country, where he had left his late niece's children, for the benefit of their health, in charge of a governess. He received me most kindly; and when I acquainted him with the object of my visit, he exclaimed, "I will make inquiries for you, Mary, amongst all my friends and acquaintances. Depend upon it, you sha'n't be out of place long. The moment I have anything good to communicate, I will drop you a note."

I thanked him—and was taking my leave, when he said, "By the bye, you have told me you gave that money to your late mistress; and as her husband has gone to prison, I don't suppose that they left you with much in your own purse. Now, you really must let me be your banker. Don't be foolish, girl: what's the use of money to one unless to do good with?"

Thus speaking, he compelled me to take a ten-pound note, and left the room abruptly to cut short the thanks I was expressing. On my way back to Conduit Street, I thought that I would inquire at the lock-up house in Chancery Lane what had become of Mr. and Mrs. Ward. Indeed it was only through motives of delicacy that I had not previously done so during the week that had elapsed since the arrest. I found the office, and saw the officer himself. He told me that by some legal process which he named, Mr. Ward had removed over to the King's Bench Prison the very day after his capture. On leaving the sheriff's-officer's house, I deliberated

whether I should repair to that gaol to see Mrs. Ward; and I thought that it would be a kind and proper action on my part. I accordingly took a hackney-coach, and directed the driver to take me thither. In about half-an-hour, having passed over Blackfriars Bridge, the vehicle stopped at a little door-way in a dead wall. I passed in—traversed an open space of ground—and ascending a flight of steps, entered a place which I found to be the lobby of the gaol. A turnkey was seated near an inner door—or rather half-door, covered with spikes; and he was dividing his attention between a newspaper and a pot of porter. To my question whether Mrs. Ward was with her husband, he gave an affirmative answer, and told me that their room was 6 in 5: then perceiving that I hesitated and looked bewildered, he explained that he meant Number 6 Chamber in Number 5 Staircase,—adding that anybody inside the building would show me the way. He then opened the half-door—I threaded a little court—traversed another lobby—and entered the enclosure of the prison,

In the midst of a surrounding wall of immense height, and covered with spikes on a revolving axis—or *chevaux de frise*—stood a spacious building, looking like a barrack; and the ground in front was thronged with such a motley assemblage of persons that I shrank back, half-regretting that I had penetrated even thus far. Some were playing at rackets—others at pitch-and-toss for half-pence: some were walking about—others were sitting down on benches, smoking and drinking. Every class of society appeared to have its representative in that place: no congress of delegates from all the grades of the British people could possibly be more complete. There was the dissipated aristocrat, whose boundless extravagance had lodged him in a gaol, but dressed with as much fastidiousness as if he were still outside. There was the young gentleman about town, who by the same means had found his way to a prison. There was the tradesman who through misfortune had sunk down into insolvency: and there were numbers of wretched, squalid, miserable-looking men, whose appearance indicated the blended effects of poverty and debauchery.

One of these last-mentioned individuals, seeing me hesitate as I entered the enclosure of the prison, accosted me and asked whom I wanted. I mentioned the number of the room and staircase to which I had been directed.

"Oh that's Mr. Ward's," at once said the man: "he come in t'other day. There he is, drunk as usual!"

I looked in the direction to which he pointed, and beheld Mr. Ward, in a dressing-gown, and with a velvet cap upon his head, staggering along at a little distance, arm-in-arm with a dissipated-looking individual who appeared as inebriated as himself. They were both smoking cigars, talking very loud, and also laughing—as if they had not a single care upon their minds. I did not wish him to see me, and told the man so—intimating that it was Mrs. Ward whom I had come expressly to visit. He offered to conduct me round by the back of the prison, whence there was an entrance into the particular staircase I sought. While thus accompanying the man, the Poor Side of the prison was pointed out to me,—the receptacle of those wretched beings who not being able to maintain themselves, received an al-



lowance from the county. I shuddered with a cold recoil from the aspect of those wretched dens, looking upon the high dead wall, and in an atmosphere of the most sickening description. In a few minutes No. 5 Staircase was reached; and the man having indicated the particular chamber which I sought, I gave him a shilling for his trouble. That room was reached by a stone staircase with an iron balustrade; and on knocking at the door, it was opened by Mrs. Ward herself.

Heavens! had one week produced such an alteration in her? Though naturally thin, pale, and sickly, she was now wan as a ghost—haggard, careworn, and looking as if she had passed through whole years of direst calamity. Her eyes being red with weeping, added to the misery of her appearance. She threw herself into my arms, sobbing and crying as if her heart would break. I besought her to be calm; and when she was enabled to compose

herself, she exclaimed, "This is kind—most kind of you, Mary; and it is even more than I expected. Oh! is it not a dreadful place? Its very horror is enhanced by those boisterous shouts which are sent up from every side. Revelry is most unnatural here. Oh, it is dreadful!"—and the poor young lady shivered as if an ice-chill were upon her.

I sat down in the little room, which served alike for parlour and chamber, but which was decently enough furnished. She told me that for the hire of this furniture she had to pay ten shillings a-week—that the room-rent was a shilling—and that there were fees and extortions of all kinds. Presently she began to speak of her husband—but hesitatingly and with evident reluctance. Her tears broke out afresh as she gave me to understand that she only saw him at meal-times, and that if she refused to supply him with money to buy beer, spirits, and cigars, he treated her most

horribly. Indeed, I could not help thinking by something she let drop, that he had even been base and cowardly enough to strike her. Painful as it was to allude to such a subject, and delicate under any circumstances to interfere between man and wife, I could not help hinting to her that it would be better for her to throw herself upon her uncle's mercy, and beseech him to give her a home once more.

"It will come to that, Mary—it will come to that!" she exclaimed: "for if I stay here much longer, I shall die of a broken heart. But how can I leave him? All love is not dead within me—though nearly so," she added with a sudden sinking of the voice. "Two or three times I have written to my uncle, to the effect which you have suggested; but I have not had courage to send the letters—and I have torn them up when penned. But I must do it—I must do it!" she added hysterically.

I said no more: I felt that I had already said as much as I ought upon such a subject. I told her that in a few days I expected to have another situation, and I besought her to write me under cover to Mrs. Chaplin, who would forward her letters to my new address, wherever it might be. She promised that she would; and after remaining nearly an hour with her, I took my departure.

Just at the moment I entered the upper lobby of the prison, a group of persons entered from the outer door; and a voice exclaimed, "Two new prisoners!"

I glanced at the little party, which consisted of two gentlemen accompanied by two individuals in whose custody they doubtless were: for it was one of these men that had uttered the ejaculation just recorded. A couple of livery-servants were in attendance, with portmanteaus and hat-boxes. But who does the reader suppose the two gentlemen were? Captain Lavender and Mr. Bergamot!

I slipped by them unperceived—or at least unrecognized—and issued forth from the prison, thinking to myself in reference to those two gentlemen, "Such is the fate to which they have come at last!"—and I certainly experienced very little pity for them. But poor Mrs. Ward—Oh! sad and mournful indeed was the impression which the spectacle of her illimitable woe had made upon my heart!

Two days afterwards I received a note from Mr. Appleton, couched in these terms:—

"August 23rd, 1831.

"My dear young friend,

"I think if you call at Sunbeam Villa, near the Cambridge Heath Gate, Hackney, you will find what you require. The lady of the house is Mrs. Summerly—an elderly widow, of somewhat eccentric habits and strange ways, but possessing a good heart withal. You will be comfortable enough there. I have known her for many, many years, and have spoken a word in your favour. But do not accept the situation unless after your interview with Mrs. Summerly you are perfectly satisfied that you will suit her and she will suit you. Don't be afraid to write and tell me that I must look out elsewhere for you, if you wish me to do so; as it will give me infinite pleasure to be of service to you.

"Your affectionate friend,

"H. APPLETON"

I lost no time in proceeding to Sunbeam Villa, which I found to be an elegant little house situated in the midst of a beautiful flower-garden, edged

round with evergreens, so that persons walking within the enclosure were screened from observation on the part of the passers-by in the road. The villa had been newly painted white, and glowed in the sunshine. The ornamental wood-work of the door and windows, and the blinds, were of bright green: the panes of glass were all rose-tinted, such as may be seen at some of the west-end mansions. In most of the windows there was an assemblage of the gayest and gaudiest flowers; while the garden itself displayed all the pomp and splendour of full-blown dahlias, sun-flowers, roses, and peonies. Altogether, the villa and its grounds presented a most cheerful aspect to the view; and with the full power of an August sun glowing upon it, the dwelling appeared to deserve its name.

On ringing at the gate-bell, a fat, elderly, jovial-looking footman, in a very bright livery, made his appearance. He had a large round red face, the very picture of good-humour; and his eyes twinkled with a kindred feeling. I mentioned my business; and with an honest frank courtesy he admitted me into the premises. The front-door, brilliant with a new coat of varnish, opened into a little hall, where a table and three or four chairs of polished oak were so bright as to reflect objects as completely as in a mirror. On that table stood an immense nosegay of flowers in a porcelain vase.

I was shown into a parlour fitted up in the gayest style, but perfectly consistent with good taste. There I remained waiting for about ten minutes; and I could not help noticing the number of pets which were distributed about. In the open window, amidst a forest of flowers in bright green pots, a beautiful parrot was chattering in his splendid cage, the brass wires of which were so highly polished that they were quite refulgent in the sun-beams. Two French poodles, so fat that they would have been certain to win the prize at any show of obese dogs, were snoozing upon the bright-coloured hearth-rug, in company with an enormous Angola cat and three or four kittens. In a crystal vase, standing upon a glowing red cloth on the centre table, a number of gold and silver fish were swimming about. A beautiful little spaniel, of the King Charles breed, was reposing on the cushion of an easy-chair. Under a glass upon a side-table, there was a perfect assemblage of parrots, macaws, and perroquets, stuffed on the most approved principle of taxidermy, and looking with their glass eyes perfectly life-like, if it were not for the absence of motion. Under another glass a French poodle was similarly preserved; and I therefore conjectured that all these defunct beings had been favourites in their time. There were a few pictures suspended to the walls; and these were in water-colour, representing glowing landscapes, with a combination of the richest and brightest colourings. They were in splendid gilt frames; but neither these, nor the frame of a superb mirror over the fire-place, were covered up with the yellow muslin generally used in well-furnished mansions for the preservation of such objects. The furniture was all of rosewood, with crimson cushions; and the carpet was of the gayest pattern. Thus, from the little I had already seen of the interior of the house, it was fair to judge that it was as cheerful and sunny as the outside.

I had waited about ten minutes, when the door opened; and an elderly lady, exceedingly stout,

walked—or rather waddled in. She was dressed in a bright-coloured silk gown, and wore a very coquetish cap with gay ribbons. Her countenance was the picture of good humour and benevolent kindness: her voice, the moment she addressed me, seemed to be modulated to the most agreeable tones; and her manner had something so maternally affable, and so utterly devoid of pretence, that it was well calculated to place me immediately at my ease in the presence of this lady. The moment she entered, the little spaniel dog leapt down from the chair, in which she forthwith deposited herself; and then he sprang upon her lap. The Angola cat likewise leapt up on her knees and lay down with the spaniel: the poodles drew near to be caressed—the kittens stood up on their hind legs against the skirt of her rich dress—and the parrot began talking in a way which showed that the bird knew its mistress and was pleased by her presence.

"You are the young person whom my old friend Mr. Appleton has recommended?" said Mrs. Summerly, with a most benevolent smile: and when I answered in the affirmative, she bade me sit down, —adding, "Mr. Appleton has spoken in the highest terms of you, Mary; and therefore if you like me as I like you, our arrangements will soon be made. But of course you wish to know what particular duties you will have to perform. I have got a niece of mine coming to stay with me for a short time: she will be here to-morrow, and you will be specially appointed to attend upon her in the capacity of lady's-maid. You must not however think that when her visit is over and she takes her departure, I shall have no farther need of your services: for my own maid is going to be married—and then you can take her place—that is to say, if you feel yourself happy and comfortable at Sunbeam Villa."

"I have no doubt, ma'am," was my reply, "that I shall be so."

"At all events, we shall try and make you as happy as we can. I think I may say," continued Mrs. Summerly, "that this is a happy household. I am not going to talk to you any absurd nonsense about not having followers, or not being visited by your friends, and so forth. I know that servants are human beings and have their own natural feelings as well as their masters and mistresses; and as I never take any one into the house with whose character I am not perfectly satisfied at the beginning, I accept it as granted that they will only be visited by respectable persons. If a young girl, for instance, is engaged to be married to a worthy and deserving young man, I would rather encourage their courtship than deal harshly with them. There is my maid Emma, who is going to be married to an excellent young man; and I let him come and take his tea with her and the other servants every Sunday evening; and if now and then I do happen to notice that they say a word to each other at the gate, as he goes to his work in the morning or returns from it in the evening—why, I shut my eyes and don't say a syllable."

"It is not every mistress who speaks and acts in this manner," I remarked, perceiving that Mrs. Summerly expected me to say something.

"And that's the very reason," she continued, "why I endeavour to treat my servants with a friendly consideration. I like to see everybody happy around me: nothing fills me with so much

delight as a cheerful, contented, and smiling countenance. Of course I expect that my pets"—and she glanced down at the dogs and cats—"will be duly cared for and well treated. For myself, Mary, I am of the most contented disposition possible. I do not like to look upon the world as a scene of unvaried woe, trouble, and trial; and as for looking upon the world's inhabitants with a jaundiced eye, I could not do it. I know very well that there are real misfortunes in life: and I don't choose to let my fancy conjure up imaginary ones. But I am keeping you here, when perhaps you would like to go and make your arrangements to come to the villa as soon as possible. Will you be able to enter upon your situation this evening?—because Miss Trevanion, my niece, will be here by mid-day to-morrow. Don't put yourself to any inconvenience, however: and if you live at a distance, take a hackney-coach, and I shall cheerfully pay the expenses."

I thanked Mrs. Summerly for her kindness, and promised that I would come in the evening: whereupon I rose to depart.

"Oh! you can't go without a little refreshment," she exclaimed: and before I could put in a word, she had deposited her pets upon the heath-rug again—and starting up from the chair, caught me by the hand, saying, "Come with me, and you shall make acquaintance at once with your fellow-servants."

She led me from the room, through a door of bright blue and yellow glass at the back part of the passage—down a staircase—into the kitchen, which was large, comfortable-looking, and quite resplendent with the brilliantly polished meat-covers and other domestic articles suspended to the walls or placed upon the shelves. There I found the red-faced footman, the cook, the housemaid, and Mrs. Summerly's own special female attendant, seated at dinner, and evidently doing justice to the comestibles. By the appearance of the table, I argued that Mrs. Summerly's domestics lived upon the best of fare.

"Don't move—don't move," she exclaimed, as they were respectfully rising from their seats. "Pray go on and enjoy yourselves. I have brought this young person that she may become acquainted with you, and take some refreshments. So sit down, Mary, and consider that this is your home."

With these words Mrs. Summerly disappeared from the kitchen; and I immediately received the most friendly welcome from those who were to be my fellow-servants. The footman I have already spoken of: I must now observe that the cook was as stout as himself, nearly of his own age, and a very comfortable-looking, good-humoured body. They were man and wife. The housemaid was about five-and-twenty—a merry, laughing, well-meaning young woman, full of joyous spirits, but without mischief. The lady's-maid was about twenty—a handsome girl, also of sprightly disposition, and remarkably good-natured. I felt myself at once at home with these persons; and they endeavoured to make me so. The footman placed me a chair,—the housemaid insisted I should take off my bonnet,—the lady's-maid received my shawl—while the cook, taking a hot plate from the front of the fire, placed upon it such a quantity of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, that I could not have got through half of it, even if I had eaten no dinner for a week. The

kindest feeling evidently prevailed amongst these servants, and was demonstrated towards me; and when I took my departure, it was with a sincere thankfulness in my heart towards Mr. Appleton for having provided me so comfortable a situation. I hastened back to Mrs. Chaplin—took leave of her—and returned, with my luggage, in a hackney-coach to Sunbeam Villa, which I reached at about six o'clock in the evening. On my arrival, Goldworthy, the footman—for he was called by his surname—insisted upon paying the coachman's fare. When I remonstrated, he declared that he had the positive orders of his mistress to do so—and who would think of acting in opposition to the desire of Mrs. Summery? This argument I held to be conclusive; and therefore he had his own way. Instead of bargaining with the driver, he paid him his demand at once, with the addition of a sixpence, "to get something to drink."

CHAPTER CXV.

MY TWELFTH PLACE.

On the following day, Sybilla Trevanion, Mrs. Summery's niece, arrived at Sunbeam Villa. I do not know that I ever beheld a more beautiful creature. She was above the medium height; and her form was so exquisitely modelled that it made her stature seem even taller than it was. Her hair was intensely dark; and without any exaggerated figure of speech, it appeared glossy as the raven's plumage. She wore it in heavy tresses, which descended upon shoulders sculptured like those of a Grecian statue. Her eyes were large and dark, but with a subdued lustre, as if their brightness yielded somewhat to a natural or else habitual pensiveness of look. They were veiled with the most magnificent fringes I ever saw; and the brows, though delicately pencilled, were nobly arched. Her countenance was purely Grecian—her forehead high and expansive—her nose perfectly straight, and exquisitely proportioned—her mouth chiselled like Cupid's bow—her chin well-rounded and rich, as in the master-pieces of classic sculpture. Her complexion was of the purest white, with but the faintest roseate tinge upon the cheek—yet not of a whiteness that was dead and insipid, but of a vital animation and a marble polish. Her hand was beautifully modelled—her ankles admirably turned—her feet long and narrow, with a high-arched instep, and a natural elasticity of tread. Her gait, her attitudes, and her gestures, were all replete with a grace as unstudied as their elegance. There was a mingled dignity and softness in her mien and her bearing which typified her character. Her lips were bright red; and when they parted, they revealed a set of the most brilliant teeth. Altogether, she was the handsomest as well as the loveliest—the most beautiful as well as the most charming creature that mortal eyes ever gazed upon. I should add that her age was about nineteen—that she was an only daughter—that her mother, Mrs. Summery's sister, had been dead for some years—and that her father, Mr. Trevanion, occupied a mansion and estate at a distance of about a dozen miles from London, in the county of Essex.

Such was Sybilla Trevanion—the young lady on whom I was now to attend. Mrs. Summery re-

ceived her niece with an effusion of the warmest welcome; and Sybilla herself was profoundly touched by her kind-hearted relative's goodness. The best chamber had been prepared for Miss Trevanion's reception: and soon after her arrival she gave me the keys of her trunks to arrange her clothes in the drawers and cupboards. Her dresses were of the handsomest description; and as I had already heard from Emma—Mrs. Summery's own maid—that Mr. Trevanion possessed a considerable estate, I felt rather surprised that Sybilla should have come to her aunt's without a female dependant of her own. While I was unpacking the boxes and putting away the various articles which they contained, I came to a large jewel-box; but on lifting it out by the upper part, with the idea that it was locked, it slipped from my hand, and coming open—for it proved to have been unlocked—the contents fell into the trunk whence I was taking it. Fortunately nothing was injured; and as I carefully put back the various jewels and ornaments which it contained, I was struck by their magnificence. Amongst them was a miniature portrait, not more than three inches in height and two in width. It was the picture of an officer, and was most beautifully executed upon ivory. It represented a young man of about five-and-twenty, strikingly handsome, with dark eyes and hair, but a somewhat melancholy expression of countenance. I only just glanced at it while about to replace it in the jewel-box—when it suddenly struck me that it was precisely the same uniform as that which my own beloved Eustace Quentin had worn when I had seen him in full dress on the beach at Dover. This circumstance naturally made me examine the portrait again. But as I contemplated it, it occurred to me that there were many regiments whose uniforms were exactly similar, and that therefore the one I now beheld represented in this miniature, need not necessarily be that of the *corps* in which Eustace served. Just at the very moment I was closing the jewel-box, the door opened; and Sybilla Trevanion entered somewhat hurriedly.

"Ah!" was the half-suppressed ejaculation that issued from her lips, as she flung her dark eyes upon me; and methought that they flashed with the light of an angry suspicion; but if so, the feeling which must have prompted it instantaneously subsided—and Miss Trevanion said in calm steady voice, "The thought suddenly occurred to me that I had put that jewel-box without locking it into the trunk ere I left home this morning; and I came for the purpose of fastening it. Because, you know," she added, taking the box from my hand, "valuables may happen to get lost—and then it is unpleasant for the domestics of a household."

"I am afraid," said I, "that you will find the contents somewhat disturbed: for in taking out the box, I dropped it, as I was holding by the edge of the lid under the supposition that it was locked; and all the jewels fell out."

"Ah!" was again the half-subdued ejaculation which issued from Sybilla's lips.

"But I have done my best, Miss," I added, "to arrange the jewels neatly in the box."

She opened it—threw a glance in—and then turning her handsome dark eyes upon me, said in a low voice, which was also slightly tremulous, "You beheld that portrait therefore? Mary Price, my aunt

has been speaking to me about you, and I know that you are an excellent girl. It is strange that within the first few hours of our acquaintance, I should have to ask of you a favour. Will you promise me to grant it?"

"You have but to speak your wishes, Miss," was my response, anticipating something with regard to the portrait: for she was evidently vexed that I had seen it.

"You have seen that portrait, Mary," she repeated, while her look assumed a singular gravity; "and it is connected therewith that I am about to beseech the favour at your hands. You will oblige me, in short, by not mentioning to a soul that you have seen the portrait, with what is inscribed at the back."

"I pledge myself most solemnly, Miss Trevanion," I answered, "that I did not see what was written at the back."

"Ah! you did not see it?" she said: and then her dark eyes were fixed penetratingly upon me, as if to read into the depths of my soul. "I believe you, Mary—I believe you," she said, perceiving that I quaked not, nor blushed, beneath her scrutinizing gaze. "And you will promise me the favour I have besought at your hands?"

"Rest assured, Miss Trevanion, that without any such injunction on your part, I should not have thought of mentioning the circumstance."

"I am sure you would not," she exclaimed: "you are a good girl—and we shall be excellent friends. There are certain reasons—But no matter! You have promised me: that is sufficient!"

With these words, accompanied by some little degree of emotion, Sybilla locked up the jewel-box in one of the drawers, which had a separate key from the others; and that key she herself took possession of. She then quitted the chamber; and I continued my task of emptying the boxes, until all their contents were properly disposed of.

Having then a couple of hours at my own disposal, I retired to my chamber, and wrote a letter to William, telling him how I had found a very comfortable place; and I likewise wrote to the post-office at Deal, describing how any letter addressed to me there was to be re-directed to my present residence. And here I may as well observe—which I did not choose to do before, in order to avoid breaking the thread of my narrative—that I had received three letters from Eustace since his departure. It was in November when he left England: it was now verging towards the end of August—and we had been nearly nine months separated. I was at Mrs. Kingston's when I received the first letter, and which fact I did mention in my narrative at the time: I was in Guernsey when I received the second—and I was with Mrs. Ward in Poland Street when I received the third. The second was written from Table Bay—the third from the wide open sea, in the continuance of the voyage to India. All three had given me the assurances of Captain Quentin's health, and of his undiminished affection towards myself. I had answered each of these letters at the time, but had directed them to Madras; and I calculated that it was only the first which could as yet have reached my beloved Eustace. I now wrote another to tell him where I was, and to reciprocate those protestations of deathless attachment which he had given to me.

Before I continue the thread of my narrative, I may as well take this opportunity of observing that all the rooms of Sunbeam Villa were furnished in the same gay, cheerful, and enlivening style as the parlour which I have described. There were no sombre and heavy draperies—no pictures with gloomy subjects—no dark-tinted paper upon the walls: but every endeavour seemed to have been exerted to make the appointments of the dwelling suitable to the name which it bore. The servants' rooms were not the dismal-looking ill-furnished places they so often are even in the best houses; but they were fitted up with every regard to cheerfulness of aspect and the comfort of their occupants. The servants set about their work, not as if it were an imperious task, but as if it were a grateful duty to be rewarded with smiles and approbation as well as with mere money-wages; and there was a generally pervasive contentment and good humour amongst all. Indeed, I had not been many hours in my new place, before I saw quite enough of it to be convinced that I should like it; and I omitted not to pen a few lines expressive of gratitude to Mr. Appleton.

Days and weeks passed—and the more I saw of Sybilla Trevanion, the more I liked her: but the more also was I convinced that there was a secret source of sorrow harbouring in her mind. She paid much attention to her toilet: not that she was vain or coquetish—and she was certainly very far from being coquetish: but she had evidently been brought up in a style which made it necessary for her to study her dress; and thus what had become habit in her father's mansion, she did not depart from at her aunt's abode. Mrs. Summerly saw a great deal of company: but her friends and visitors, though numerous, were nevertheless select: that is to say, she chiefly courted the acquaintance of those whose dispositions and temperaments were, as nearly as possible, congenial with her own. She was exceedingly charitable, and was much beloved by all her neighbours. The eccentricities to which Mr. Appleton had alluded in his note, were of the most amiable description, and displayed themselves chiefly in a departure from those cold formalities which superiors are wont to maintain towards their inferiors. Not that Mrs. Summerly fell into the opposite extreme and became unduly familiar with those whom she thus kindly treated: she always maintained her own self-respect, and was therefore respected by others. Her principal eccentricity was with regard to her pets; and to these she devoted no inconsiderable amount of time. She made the housemaid wash the French poodles regularly at short intervals, and superintended the operation: and if ever the smiles disappeared from her countenance, it was when by any accident one of the dogs or cats happened to get trod upon or otherwise hurt. Then she would display the liveliest grief: and as I was told by Mrs. Goldworthy, the cook, she had wept bitterly at the death of the poodle who was preserved in the glass-case.

But to return to Sybilla Trevanion. This young lady possessed one of those natures which are not very easily fathomed. When in the company of her aunt, she appeared to be in good spirits; but when in her chamber with me, she would sometimes fall into fits of abstraction, which, as I have above hinted, I could not possibly think devoid of a profound me-

lancholy. She would start up—fling her quick glances upon me, as if to observe whether I had noticed her—and would then display so sudden a cheerfulness that I hardly knew whether to consider it assumed or not. She was kind and friendly in her bearing towards me; and though there were some points of her disposition which I could not fathom, there were nevertheless many excellent and generous qualities that developed themselves. I may add that she was highly accomplished; and never have I heard a more finished musician. She could elicit from the harp such tones as no other hand which I had ever seen sweep its strings, could bring forth. She would make it speak, sing, and complain, when performing a “voluntary” or imaginative piece of music: she would draw forth sounds representing the murmuring of waves, the rushing of the whirlwind, the gentle sighing of the breeze, or the songs and the chirping of birds; then suddenly she would break off into a broad and grand swell of harmony—or into the stately march of solemn music—or into an air of the most harmonious simplicity. She created a melody which seemed to proceed from the heart, and to appeal unto it likewise: she could ravish, startle, or entrance: she could strike the soul with awe, or plunge it into a state of delicious feeling. I have heard her suddenly break forth from tones touching and pathetic, into a perfect torrent of sounds expressive of violent grief or maddening rage—so that the audience have been hurried by the power of her performance through every variety of intense and excited feelings.

It was in such moments as those, when seated at the harp or at the piano, that Sybilla Trevanion appeared to the utmost advantage of her exceeding personal beauty—while her countenance too would express all varieties of emotion, according to the ever-changing spirit of the music which she made. Sometimes she appeared touchingly lovely and sweetly interesting—at others superbly handsome and grandly beautiful. In her rarest and finest moods, her countenance seemed to become radiant and her entire form to expand, as if with a preternatural animation: her nostrils would dilate—her neck would lift itself from its habitual swan-like curvature, and raise the classically shaped head with a queen-like dignity.

Her conversation may be described as of a somewhat serious cast: that is to say, she never talked upon those light frivolities and airy nothings which enter so largely into the usual routine of discourse in society. But she would speak, with the enthusiasm of one who felt all she said, upon such subjects as poetry, drawing, music, history, and all the solid or elegant accomplishments wherein she herself was so proficient. Yet there was naught of the blue-stocking in her conversation—no attempt to show off her acquirements: nothing with her was done for display. She did not require pressing to play or sing; and when she had finished, she received with a calm and graceful dignity the compliments which her performance elicited. Altogether Sybilla was a brilliant young woman: but still this very brilliancy was sublated to a certain degree by a modest reserve totally unaffected. She soon became a general favourite with all the visitors at Sunbeam Villa; and as she had not before visited her aunt for some years, these were for the most part new

acquaintances that she made and new friends that she formed.

I have said that it had struck me Sybilla Trevanion harboured some secret source of grief; and in my own mind I could not help connecting it with that portrait which I had seen. This was not only because she had so particularly enjoined me not to speak of it—but likewise because on two or three occasions, within the first month of her stay at the villa, I caught her gazing intently into the jewel-box when, unconscious of her presence in her own chamber, I entered it to perform some duties. I likewise found, from her conversation, that she was superstitiously inclined—I do not mean in the mere vulgar sense which believes in horrid spectres—but in that loftier one which admits the idea of a direct and frequent intervention of heaven in human affairs through the medium of mystic warnings, dreams, presentiments, and spiritual apparitions. I was somewhat surprised when I first made this discovery: for I thought that such a belief was but little compatible with the power of her intelligence and the accomplishments of her mind. But there was something strange and mysterious in Sybilla Trevanion's nature; and the more I knew of her, the deeper was the interest I experienced in her behalf. She soon showed an inclination to converse in a friendly way with me; and when she found that I was able to discourse with her upon many of her own favourite topics, she would frequently seek opportunities of being alone with me in her chamber for the purpose of conversation.

The incident I am about to relate, occurred one day at the expiration of about a month after I had entered my new place. It was between four and five o'clock in the evening, at which time Miss Trevanion was accustomed to ascend to her chamber to dress for dinner. Company was expected that day; and so soon as I learnt that Sybilla had gone up to commence her toilet, I ascended from the kitchen to render her the usual assistance. As I entered the chamber, I was dismayed and horrified on perceiving Miss Trevanion stretched senseless upon the carpet. It was towards the close of September, when the days are still long; and as the villa fronted the west, the effulgence of the declining sun poured in at the casement. The jewel-box was open upon the chest of drawers, close by which she was stretched; and the portrait of the young officer was lying near her upon the floor, evidently having fallen from her hand when she sank down in that fit. I rushed forward—raised her in my arms—and hastened to unfasten her dress. She gasped heavily; and the return of consciousness was evidently accompanied by much physical pain. I got water and sprinkled it upon her countenance: this revived her rapidly—and opening her eyes, she threw a wild look around. Her glance settled upon the portrait—a strong shudder appeared to sweep through her entire form—and then, as if with another and equally rapid change of feeling, she pressed that portrait to her lips, kissing it passionately. A flood of tears now came to her relief; and for some moments she sobbed violently. But all in an instant dashing away her tears and stifling those sobs, she fixed her looks long and earnestly upon the portrait: and then with a deep convulsing sigh, murmured, “Could it be a delusion? God grant that it was so!”

She had risen up to her feet while giving way to

this rapid succession of varied emotions, and appeared perfectly unconscious of my presence. I felt awkward and embarrassed, with the conviction that I had been the spectatrix of a scene which she would not have had me behold. It was with a sudden start that her looks settled upon me: then, as a remembrance of what had happened and of the succour which I must have rendered her, doubtless swept back to her mind, she replaced the portrait in the jewel-box, which she deliberately locked up in the drawer; and again turning towards me, she took my hand, saying, "Thank you, Mary—thank you, dear Mary—for the assistance you gave me."

Sybilla's voice was tremulous and her countenance was deathly pale as she spoke. She glanced towards the door, evidently to assure herself that it was shut; and observing that it was, she said, "You must not mention what has happened to a single soul! But that portrait, Mary—I adjure you to tell me—did you see the inscription upon the back?"

"No, Miss Trevanion," I answered firmly and seriously; "after what you said to me relative to that portrait, the very first day you were here, I would not for worlds give way to the impulse of any undue curiosity."

"I know you would not—I am sure you would not!" she answered quickly: then after a few moments' profound consideration, she inquired, "Have you ever felt, Mary, a strange mysterious sensation coming as it were like a cloud over the spirits, without any known or accountable cause at the time?"

"I think, Miss Trevanion," I answered, "that what you describe must be within the range of every body's experience. You mean that a melancholy feeling sometimes steals in unto the mind, without any immediate or direct apparent cause?"

"That is precisely what I do mean," rejoined Sybilla, her voice being low and deep, and her look full of a superstitious awe. "This mysterious sensation comes at times upon persons in the bustle of life, in the midst of the gay circle of friends, and in the broad glare of day—as well as in the retreats of solitude, the silence of one's own chamber, and in the depth of night. It seems to take its origin from a single thought flitting through the mind, or from a transient impulse of the memory; yet when it comes, both the thought and the reminiscence may possibly have passed away, not to be recalled. Well, Mary, you have experienced this feeling—and it was such a feeling that came over me just now, when I was seated with my aunt down stairs and we were both in a gay mood. I came up to my room to escape from that feeling: but it clung to me—and it deepened in intensity. Ah! I might have known that I could not escape it thus: for often and often have I experienced it before!"

She paused—and swept her hand with an expression of anguish across her brow. That expression disappeared as quickly as it came, leaving her countenance pale and serenely grave as it was before.

"It would be useless to conceal from you, Mary," she continued, "that this portrait which you have seen, is the likeness of one whose image my heart cherishes. He is now far away; but though seas divide us physically, yet is he ever with me in the spirit. Perhaps you understand my meaning."

I did indeed: for she had described my own position in respect to my beloved Eustace Quentin—and her remark that he whom she loved was far away

across the seas, called up an involuntary sigh from my heart; but she did not observe any emotion which I may have displayed: for though her eyes were fixed upon me at the time, yet all her attention was evidently turned inwardly to the contemplation of the subjects uppermost in her own mind.

"If you do understand me," she continued, still in a deep melancholy voice, "you will be at no loss to conceive how I at once associated that mysterious feeling of oppression which came over my spirits, with the object nearest and dearest to my heart. An irresistible impulse led me to open the jewel-box and take forth that portrait. But as I gazed upon it, it seemed as if the features became animated with real life,—not the life which the talent of the artist has given to that countenance—but a veritable inspiration from some superior power. Methought that the eyes looked out at me, and that they gazed with an ineffable melancholy—an increasing despondency—yet mingled with a fervid tenderness, such as no language can possibly depict. And this look—Oh! it deepened into such a sadness, that it seemed as if a mortal blow were stricken at my heart—and then all consciousness abandoned me."

"But, Miss Trevanion," I said, "your own good sense doubtless makes you aware that this was only imagination on your part. You were under the influence of despondency at the time—"

"Ah! Mary," she interrupted me with a look so full of a superstitious awe and sadness that it both surprised and afflicted me; "I know everything that you would say—I can anticipate all the arguments which common sense must urge in such a matter. But I cannot throw off from my mind the weight of dismal foreboding which has settled upon it: I cannot reject the conviction that there was something more than the mere work of fancy in what I have told you. Mary, my reason is not unbingsed—my intellect is as lucid at this moment as in the best and brightest hours of my existence; and I tell you deliberately, solemnly, and impressively, that I *did* behold the change come over that portrait—I *did* see the look of sadness—Oh! such profound melancholy, which that beloved countenance shed upon me!"

I knew not what to say: I was grieved and amazed to hear Sybilla talk thus. All the arguments which in the calmness of the mind would have been suggested by common sense to destroy that superstitious belief, escaped me then: I sought for them in vain—I was bewildered and perplexed.

"Do you know," she suddenly asked, laying her hand upon my arm and looking me earnestly in the face, "why it was that I left my father's house somewhat abruptly a month back and came hither for change of scene with my kind old aunt? Ah! I see that you do not—and I will tell you. It is a strange circumstance—and when I have narrated it, I must leave you to put upon it whatsoever construction you will. I had a maid-servant named Sophia. She was a young woman, two or three years older than yourself, and remarkably good-looking. She had not been with me many months—and there was nothing in her disposition or her attentions towards me, to make me care for her more than for any other maid who had ever been in my service. The incident I am about to relate occurred just six weeks ago—that is to say, a fortnight

before I came to Sunbeam Villa. One evening I experienced that same kind of mysterious presentiment of evil which came over me just now, and I could not shake it off before retiring to rest. It was in this mood that I fell asleep; and gradually I began to dream of various things, in which there was much confusion, trouble, and horror. At length it appeared to me as if I heard a wild and thrilling cry ring through the moon-lit air; and this was immediately followed by gurgling and plashing sounds, as of one struggling in the last drowning agonies. Then all was still: there was an interval in my dream—a blank, as it appeared—and then all in a moment it seemed as if somebody was standing at the side of my bed. I could not immediately distinguish who it was; and methought I lay gazing upon the object and wondering how it could possibly have obtained admission to my chamber, as I invariably locked my door at night, and remembered having done so on the present occasion. I had no power to move—no power to cry out: but while I lay ruminating what this appearance could mean, and with no very considerable degree of terror in my mind—merely a solemn awe, mingled with wonder—the figure became more distinct, until I recognized my maid Sophia. She was dressed as I had seen her when she had quitted me on my retiring to rest, with the addition of her bonnet and shawl. Then it appeared as if my tongue was suddenly unlocked; and recovering the faculty of speech, I asked her what she wanted, and what she meant by being dressed for going out at that time of night? She did not answer, but bent upon me a countenance so deadly pale, and with a look so sad—Oh, so deeply sad—that I became frightened. Then I noticed that she seemed dripping wet—and that her hair hung down all dishevelled beneath her bonnet, which was bent and disarranged. I could see that her garments were saturated. For nearly a minute did she stand thus gazing upon me, while I, with a terror growing into an excruciation, kept my eyes fixed upon her. Suddenly it struck me that it must be a dream. I closed my eyes to shut out the horrid apparition: but in a few moments I opened them again, and beheld it not. So profound was the impression made upon my mind, that I felt the necessity of getting out of bed with the idea of solving the mystery, if possible, or of obtaining some evidence to confirm or refute the idea it had left behind. I was at that moment armed with a sort of preternatural courage. I descended from the couch—looked anxiously round the room, into which the moonlight penetrated—but beheld nothing to alarm me. I lighted a candle, and examined the carpet by the side of the bed: but it was not wet where the apparition had stood—and yet it had seemed to me as if the water had dripped off her garments on the floor. I then examined the door, and found that it was fast locked, the key being inside, just as I had left it ere retiring to rest. I had a great inclination to proceed to Sophia's room and assure myself that she was there: my hand was even upon the key to unlock the door—when the thought struck me that if I did visit her chamber and if I found that I had only passed through the horrible vagaries of a dream, I should be exposing myself to ridicule. I therefore abandoned the idea, and returned to my couch. I should however

observe that I consulted my watch, and found that it was half-an-hour past midnight. I left the candle burning: but not another wink of sleep could I obtain for the remainder of that night. I lay pondering upon what had occurred, and half-regretting that I had not sought the maid's room in pursuance of my original intention. I arose soon after six o'clock,—feverish, restless, and with a strong presentiment of evil still in my mind. Having dressed myself, I thought that I might now on some pretence ascend to Sophia's chamber: for I experienced a poignant and intolerable degree of suspense. But just as I was about to leave the room, I heard numerous voices speaking in the garden in front of the house, and upon which my chamber looked. I hurried to the window—and to my horror and dismay perceived several labourers bearing amongst them an object which even at the first glance it was impossible to mistake. It was a corpse—the corpse of a female! No words can describe the mortal terror which seized upon me at that moment. I beheld in the circumstance the confirmation of my dream—if a dream it could be called. I must tell you that within fifty yards of the garden-railings, and altogether not a hundred yards from the house itself, flows the River Lea; and across it is a ricketty dilapidated old wooden bridge, a part of the railing of which I had noticed a few days back to have been broken away. But to continue my narrative, I should proceed to observe that several of the servants who were already up,—such as the gardeners and grooms—were hurrying forth to meet the labourers bearing the corpse; and it was their voices, questioning anxiously and replying hastily, which had reached my ears. I stood at that window for nearly a minute, rivetted to the spot in direst horror; and it was not until the sad spectacle had disappeared from my view by being borne round an angle of the building, that I had the power to move. I then rushed down stairs, and meeting one of the domestics in the hall, learnt the shocking intelligence that Sophia had been discovered drowned in the river."

Here Sybilla Trevanion paused, and looked at me to mark the impression which her narrative had produced. For a few moments I knew not what to say: I was astounded and bewildered. But at length I began to discover what I conceived to be the true meaning of the mystery.

"Did you ever entertain any suspicion," I asked, "that your maid was accustomed to go out at night?"

"Never," responded Miss Trevanion emphatically. "If so, she should not have remained in my service."

"Nevertheless," I resumed, "methinks that the occurrence can be naturally accounted for. You had observed, Miss Trevanion, a few days previously that the railings of the bridge were broken; and no doubt the idea had struck you—as indeed it must—that it was very unsafe for persons to pass over. That idea may have been speedily dismissed from your thoughts: but still it lingered in the depth of your mind, together with all other impressions which, being once received, the memory treasures up. On the particular night of which you have spoken, you retired to rest with a depression of spirits—your dreams were troubled—and no doubt, being half awake, it was the real cry of distress which the poor



drowning girl sent forth, that reached your ears, the distance being so short. Most probably you recognized the tones of the voice which thus gave out its accents of dying agony; and though you were not sufficiently awake to enable yourself to discern at the time whose particular voice it was, yet it nevertheless produced its due impression on your mind. That cry of agony, coupled with the circumstance that you had a few days previously remarked the dangerous condition of the bridge—and the direction from which the cry must have come—made you fancy that you heard the plashing sounds of water as if with the death-struggles of a drowning person; and then the apparition was by no means an unnatural conjuration of a fevered fancy under such circumstances."

"All this is ingenious enough, Mary," replied Miss Trevanion, with grave and solemn looks; "and I have listened to you with attention. But hear the rest. In the course of that day, when my mind had

somewhat recovered from the shock it had received, I went to view the body in the room where it was deposited, awaiting the coroner's inquest. Do not think it was through any morbid feeling of curiosity: it was to ascertain a fact. The corpse had on the very same bonnet and shawl which I had seen the apparition wear by the side of my couch the night before!"

"Yes, Miss Trevanion," said I; "but doubtless you had on former occasions observed your maid wear those same things."

"True!" rejoined Sybilla. "And yet was it not singular, to say the least of it, that she should have had on that very identical bonnet and that very identical shawl at the time? However, I see, Mary, that it will be difficult to convince you there was anything preternatural in the occurrence: we will not therefore dwell upon this portion of the narrative. I will proceed to inform you under what circumstances it was that Sophia came by her death.

She was courted by a respectable young man who lived with his parents, about a mile distant, on the opposite side of the river. She had a holiday on the preceding Sunday to visit at the cottage of her intended husband; and it appeared that on the Wednesday night following—which was the memorable one of her death—there was to be a little gathering of friends at that cottage. She was anxious to be of the party; but having so recently had a holiday, she did not like to ask for permission to go out again. She however bethought herself that she would steal forth after I had retired to rest, and join her friends for an hour or two. She did so, and went to the cottage. Her intended husband was to have escorted her back again as far as the garden-gate: but it appeared that he partook of an unusual quantity of liquor, though generally speaking a sober and well-conducted young man; and he fell asleep in his chair. Out of kind consideration, Sophia would not suffer him to be awakened, and accordingly set off alone to return. This was at ten minutes past twelve o'clock; and therefore at about the half-hour must she have fallen from the bridge and met her death. That was the very time when I beheld her form standing by the side of my couch."

"Yes," I answered; "because, as I have already shown, it was in reality her cries which you did hear; and that portion of your dream was not the result of fancy."

"You must have it your own way, Mary," replied Miss Trevanion. "The particulars which I have related in respect to the circumstances leading to Sophia's death, transpired at the coroner's inquest; and therefore not the slightest ground existed for any suspicion that she had experienced foul play. Indeed, the young man who had been engaged to her, was overwhelmed with grief, and blamed himself bitterly for having drunk to such an excess as to be unable to escort her safely home. There is reason to suppose that she herself, being unaccustomed to liquor, was slightly under the influence of what she had taken—and hence the catastrophe. The verdict was delivered suitably with the evidence; and the poor creature was interred in the neighbouring churchyard. I should add, Mary, that I did not think it necessary to mention that circumstance which you regard as a kind of half-waking dream: for knowing how sceptical the world is on these points, I naturally avoided provoking ridicule or having the sanity of my intellects questioned. You may however suppose that the occurrence made a very powerful impression on me; and for a fortnight I struggled in vain against the unpleasant influence. Then I resolved to seek change of scene for a short time; and with my father's permission, I wrote to my aunt to tell her that I should come immediately and pay her a visit. Not having had time to provide myself with another maid, I requested her in my letter to procure the requisite attendance for me as speedily as possible, as I knew that her household was somewhat limited."

By the time Miss Trevanion had thus finished her narrative, the knocking and ringing at the front-door showed that the company was arriving, and she had to make a hasty toilet. I saw that there was still a deep depression in her spirits, and which she was struggling to escape from. Though naturally pale, she was paler than usual: but on the

other hand, there was a brighter lustre in her eyes—a feverish gleaming, the unnatural light of which would not be observed by those who were ignorant through what phases of emotion she had passed within the last hour. When she was dressed in her evening costume, she looked eminently beautiful, that enhanced pallor of her countenance rendering her loveliness all the more touchingly interesting.

"Remember, Mary," she said, taking my hand and pressing it warmly ere she issued from the chamber, "you are to keep the secret of the portrait inviolable—so long as circumstances," she added with a deep foreboding sigh, "may render such secrecy necessary!"

I renewed my promise to that effect; and she descended to the drawing-room. Later in the evening, when the dinner was over and the company were again assembled in that drawing-room, I had occasion to enter for some purpose, and I beheld Sybilla Trevanion seated at the harp, around which her white arms were thrown; and never perhaps did mortal eyes behold arms more exquisitely modelled. She was performing one of those imaginary pieces which I have already endeavoured to describe, and which hurried the listeners with such whirlwind rapidity through such varied successions of feeling. There was now a slight carnation-tinge upon her cheeks, as if they reflected as much as their alabaster fairness *could* reflect, the emotions which glowed in her heart and which inspired the magic power of her music. It was only for about a minute that I had the opportunity of gazing upon her on that occasion: but it struck me that I had never seen Sybilla Trevanion look more sublimely handsome than at that moment—and never any other woman so handsome at all. It was evident that she was exerting herself to the utmost to conquer her depression of the spirits, and escape from the influence which the affair of the portrait had shed upon her mind: but methought that her exhilaration was unnatural—that it was forced—and though the harmony she rang forth from the harp was wilder, and alternating between more grandeur and more pathos than ever, yet that it was in a sort of desperation she thus revelled in that romantic wilderness of sounds.

CHAPTER CXVI.

SYBILLA TREVANION.

A FEW days after the incidents just related, I received a letter from Mrs. Ward, forwarded through the agency of Mrs. Chaplin, and the contents of which gave me some degree of satisfaction. But first of all I was sadly pained by reading an account of the cruelties to which she had been subjected by her husband before she could finally make up her mind to leave him. To this step however she had at length been driven, and had thrown herself upon the mercy of her uncle. It appeared that he had consented to receive her beneath his roof, on the one condition that she would sue for a divorce against Mr. Ward,—for which proceeding she had alike ample cause and evidence, as he had not only treated her with a cold-blooded cruelty, but even within the walls of the King's Bench Prison had

found opportunities of indulging in such profligacies that no married woman could endure. She had therefore assented to her uncle's proposal, and at the time she wrote to me, was once more installed at his house, where she invited me to call and see her. Her husband, it appeared, was still in prison, and was preparing to take the benefit of the Insolvents' Act, towards the expenses of which he had by some means or another found the funds.

I had written a long letter to my sister Sarah, and another to Mr. Selden, recapitulating at great length, and in the most impressive language I could command, the representations which I had made when I called upon them in Margaret Street. But these letters remained unanswered. As I had now been more than a month in Mrs. Summery's service, I was entitled to a holiday, of which opportunity I availed myself to pay another visit to Mr. Selden's abode—determined that this time I would speak more at length, and if possible in a more urgent and resolute manner than on the former occasion. But on arriving in Margaret Street, I learnt that "Mr. and Mrs. Selden had gone out of town for a few weeks." At first I thought that this was merely an excuse which the domestic had been ordered to allege, to prevent me from obtaining an interview with my sister; but at the moment I was hesitating on the threshold of the front-door what I should say or do, a gentleman came up, inquiring of the servant if Mr. Selden had returned yet? The answer he received was the same which had been given to me; and I went away, so far satisfied that it was not a mere pretext. I called on Mrs. Ward, whom I found miserably pale, thin, and baggard, and deeply depressed in spirits. In the course of conversation she hinted that as Mr. Screwby kept her exceedingly short of money, for fear lest she should send any to her worthless husband, she was as yet unable to repay me the twenty pounds I had lent her: but I assured her that even if she were rolling in riches, I should never take that money, as I considered that Mr. Appleton at the time had really intended me to assist my mistress therewith. I asked her if she had heard anything respecting Alderman Bull's daughters and their husbands; but she informed me that Mr. Screwby never alluded to the circumstance of those ladies' marriage. I took tea with Mrs. Chaplin; and at about seven o'clock in the evening returned to Sunbeam Villa. I have already mentioned that the garden was surrounded by evergreens, so that persons passing by, were unseen by those in the enclosure. As I was going round to the back entrance, being still outside the garden, I heard a somewhat stern masculine voice say, "I must both entreat and insist that you listen to this proposal. I have told you the circumstances in which I am placed: it will be the ruin—"

"But, good heavens, dear father!" replied the voice of Sybilla; "it will be death to me!"—and her accents were those of an intense shuddering anguish.

I hurried along the little narrow alley skirting the side of the garden, and heard no more. But the few words I had thus caught, were sufficient to make me comprehend that Mr. Trevanion was at the villa—that he was walking with his daughter in the garden—and that he was urging her to accept some proposal vitally necessary to his interests, but from which she recoiled with the direst repugnance.

What proposal could this be, except one which was to bestow her in marriage where she could not give her heart? The intensity of her repugnance I could full well understand, having been entrusted with the secret of her love for the young officer who was the original of the miniature-portrait.

Mr. Trevanion went away very shortly after I had overheard him speaking in the garden; and therefore I did not see him upon this occasion. When I attended upon Sybilla in her chamber at the hour of her retirement, she was evidently suffering from a deep depression of spirits. She spoke but a few words; and these were uttered vaguely and incoherently—nor did she appear to heed my responses. All of a sudden she burst forth into a violent flood of tears; and taking me by the hand, murmured in a voice broken by sobs, "Pity me, Mary—I am the most unhappy creature on the face of this earth!"

I was deeply affected at the young lady's wild and bitter grief: but I did not choose to say that accident had given me some insight into the cause of it.

"You already know so much concerning me," she resumed, when the passionate vehemence of that outburst of affliction had subsided, "that I feel as if there were relief in making you my confidante. I do not treat you as a dependant, Mary: circumstances have made me regard you in another and more friendly light. Besides, without any fulsome flattery to yourself—which indeed I am thoroughly incapable of offering—I must observe that you are so superior to your position in life, your notions and tastes are so refined, that I love to converse with you."

She paused, and again pressed my hand as if with the warmth of one who felt that she really wanted a friend, and that it would relieve her to unbosom her thoughts.

"My dear Mary," she continued, "I have this evening received a piece of intelligence that has cruelly afflicted me, and a proposal that has profoundly shocked me. I must tell you that there dwells in the neighbourhood of our house in Essex, a very wealthy gentleman named Woodville—double my age, and of a stern, harsh, and repulsive disposition. He is a widower and childless. This Mr. Woodville proposed for my hand about eighteen months back—when I rejected him, although much against my father's wishes. For some time my father seemed to cherish a considerable degree of displeasure at this refusal on my part: but latterly he had abstained from speaking to me on the subject. Now, however, it is all revived again: Mr. Woodville has been in communication with my father—and circumstances have occurred—In short, Mary, it appears that my poor father is not the rich man that the world believes him to be; and to amend his broken fortunes the sacrifice of myself is demanded!"

Sybilla had given utterance to these last words with accents and looks of the deepest distress, clinging to my hand, as it were, while I stood before her, she being seated upon a couch at the foot of the bed. When she had finished, her tears and her sobs broke forth anew; and quitting her grasp upon my hand, she wrung both her own in a paroxysm of despair. Several minutes elapsed ere she could recover any degree of calmness; and during that interval I said nothing, although by my looks I showed

her how much I sympathised with her. But what could I say? I had rather not have been made a confidante in this affair: at the same time I could not refuse to become so, as it was a relief to the poor young lady thus to pour forth her sorrows to me. At length I ventured to inquire if her aunt Mrs. Summerly were acquainted with the object of Mr. Trevanion's call at the villa?

"No," was the response. "My father does not wish her to learn his difficulties. I should not breathe a syllable, Mary, upon this subject to your ears, were it not that I have such perfect confidence in you that I know you will keep inviolate all I say. My father did not touch upon the matter in my aunt's presence: he bade me walk with him in the garden—and there it was that he gradually broke to me the position of his affairs and the only means by which ruin could possibly be averted. Oh, Mary, what am I to do? Good heavens, what can I do? On the one hand there is my father hovering on the brink of dishonour and destruction: on the other hand—"

But here she stopped suddenly short, and an expression of such wild anguish passed over her splendid countenance that it cut me to the very quick to behold that expression of mental agony. Full well, methought, could I comprehend the struggle that was taking place in her mind; and from the depths of my soul did I pity her.

"One week hence," she continued, in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible, "my father will come back for my answer. He told me so: those were his last words this evening in the garden. What answer can I give? Even apart from other reasons, it would seal my unhappiness beyond the power of redemption to be compelled to accept Mr. Woodville—But no, I cannot! it is impossible—impossible!" and now she covered her face with her hands and wept in hysterical bitterness.

"I cannot leave you, Miss Trevanion," I said when she grew a little more composed, "to pass the night by yourself;"—for I was really afraid that in the excitement of her mind she might even lay violent hands upon herself. "Permit me to remain with you: I will sit by your side till you are asleep, and will then lie down upon this couch."

"No, Mary—I will not tax your kindness thus far," she answered. "I feel better now: it has done me good to make you the confidante of my sorrows. And now good night, dear Mary. To-morrow morning you will find me calm. I shall, perhaps, write a long letter to my father—But we will talk no more now. Good night."

I quitted her—but not without some degree of reluctance; for I saw that this calmness, so suddenly succeeding such violent paroxysms of grief, could not possibly be natural. It was a long time before I got to sleep that night; and in the morning I went at an earlier hour than usual to Sybilla's chamber. She was already up, and had half completed her toilet. As she had foretold, she was calm; and to the observer who knew nothing of all that was agitating in her heart, this calmness would have seemed natural: but to myself, who could look beneath the surface, it appeared to be only the result of a strong and well nigh preterhuman control which her powerful mind was enabled to assert over her feelings. She said nothing upon the painful topic of the preceding evening; and of

course I did not in the slightest way allude to it. Throughout that day she continued to be nerved with the strength which enabled her to assume this outward air of calmness; and in the evening the strange wild music which she elicited from the harp, rang as usual through the house. I could not help thinking that her's was altogether a spirit as strange and wild as the music itself, and that it was this romantic spirit indeed which inspired those wondrous strains. When she retired for the night and I assisted at her toilet, she still forebore from making the slightest allusion to the one grand topic which I nevertheless knew to be engrossing her thoughts: but her bearing towards me was, if possible, more friendly than ever—bordering even upon sisterly affection. Thus several days passed; and still no allusion to that sad subject—still the continuance of that external calm—still the same affectionate demeanour towards myself.

It was now the evening of the sixth day after Mr. Trevanion's visit to Mrs. Summerly's house; and I had a presentiment, when I ascended to Sybilla's chamber at the hour of retiring to rest, that the seal of silence was at length to be broken once more. It was always my habit to wait till the bell rang to summon me to her; and when it had sounded, I went up-stairs with a palpitating heart. On entering the chamber, I beheld her reclining upon the couch at the foot of the bed,—her head supported upon her hand, the long taper fingers appearing like alabaster amidst the rich masses of her rare hair. She was marble pale—her looks were bent down in deep meditation, the thick fringes of the eyelids resting upon the cheeks: her lips were slightly apart, and were of a less vivid bright red than was their wont. The unnatural pallor which overspread her cheeks, had extended its influence to those scarlet lips. The other arm which was not engaged in supporting the head, hung down in its polished whiteness upon the dark dress that she wore; and her entire position denoted the abandonment of deep despair. I advanced noiselessly into the room, experiencing a sensation like that of awe: for Sybilla's illimitable woe, now too deep even for tears or passionate outburst, had something so solemn in it as to appear too sacred to be intruded upon. I had witnessed some scenes of sorrow and affliction in my life: and the images of Lady Harlesdon, Selina Temple, Laura Maitland, and Mrs. Ward rose up in my mind at the moment. I had likewise experienced on occasions an ineffable anguish of my own: but methought that never had I beheld so sadly perfect an impersonation of blank and forlorn despair as that which I now saw before me.

For several minutes Sybilla remained in that position, motionless as if turned into a marble statue. I did not even hear her breathe: I could not distinguish that she *was* breathing;—and if she had been lying completely back, and in no way self-supporting, I should have fancied she was dead. I stood near the couch, unable to take my eyes off her. I dared not move: it would have appeared to me a crime or a desecration to disturb her: for I feared that if aroused from that stupor of despair, she would only burst forth into the vehemence of a frenzied gushing torrent of irrepressible anguish. But in this I was mistaken: for after a time she slowly raised her eyes, and by

her look showed that she knew I had been standing there.

"Come and sit down by my side, Mary," she said—and her voice was so cold, so glacial in its tones, that it seemed as if it were indeed a marble statue that was speaking: yet in this voice of ice there was no evidence of unkindness or chill reserve towards myself.

I did take a seat by her side; and she laid her hand upon mine. It was cold as marble, and sent a shiver throughout my entire frame. Yet I withdrew not my own hand from that death-like contact: nor did she perceive the effect it produced upon me. I would not for worlds that she should have done so, lest she should have thought I recoiled unkindly from her touch.

"Mary," she continued after a pause, and still speaking in that unnaturally freezing tone which almost frightened me, "my mind is made up—if indeed I ever had the power to deliberate upon the subject at all. I am placed in that position which compels me to prefer the ruin of a father to that other alternative to which I need only thus allude. To-morrow he will come for my answer. I shall then tell him frankly and candidly that I love another, to whom I am bound by bonds which cannot be broken—and that no matter what may ensue, my course is irrevocable. It is a dreadful situation to be placed in: but I am nerving myself—heaven alone can tell with what powerful and even superhuman efforts I am thus nerving myself, to meet the crisis with becoming courage. I told you, Mary, that I would write to my father: but I have not done so—and you have seen that for the six days past I have studiously avoided referring to the subject. For I felt that if that cord which vibrates to my heart's very core, were touched ever so slightly, all the fabric of my calmness, my courage, and my self-possession would fall in a moment and dissolve away like a dream!"

She paused—and I feared that she would give way to a sudden outburst of grief; for her voice had become slightly tremulous towards the end of her speech. But no: she preserved that glacial calmness, so unnatural and likewise so terrible to contemplate; and when she spoke again at the expiration of about a minute, it was in the same firm, frozen, and monotonous accents as before, without emphasis, without the slightest tremulousness arising from the agitation of the hidden feelings.

"You have seen that portrait—you know that it is the likeness of him who is dearer to me than all the world beside—dearer than father or home—dearer than all that father's happiness and fortunes—dearer than life itself! Well then, Mary, you cannot wonder if I swear by everything solemn and sacred—and if I invoke heaven itself to attest the vow—that never, while he lives, will I even in thought prove faithless to this dearly loved and absent one, as I am utterly incapable of proving faithless to him in deed. There! my vow is recorded—and I seal it with the most solemn of oaths, invoking heaven's direst vengeance upon my head if I break it! So long as that adored one breathes the air of this world, the affection which I bear him and the fidelity I owe him must remain paramount above every other consideration."

I would have interrupted Miss Trevanion in the midst of this speech which recorded an oath that

seemed to me so terrible and fearful to hear: but I had not the power to speak—I was paralysed—I was speechless. The whole scene was invested with an indescribable awe—a solemnity that reigned predominant over my mind. I felt that I likewise was pale as death—that my blood appeared frozen into stagnation in my veins—and that if I had spoken it would have been also in a voice of ice.

"Now," said Miss Trevanion, slowly rising from the couch when she had done speaking, "I will prepare for retiring to rest."

I assisted her according to custom with her night-toilet; and during the process she alluded not again to the topic on which she had spoken with such awful solemnity. But she endeavoured to converse with a certain degree of cheerfulness upon some new work which she had lately been reading; and again must I remark that if it had been in the presence of persons unacquainted with the torturing nature of the thoughts that her bosom harboured, their existence would have remained unsuspected. When I retired, she bade me good night with an effusion of affectionate kindness; and on gaining my chamber I could think of little else beyond all that had just taken place. When I lay down to rest, it was long before sleep visited my eyes; and then I was haunted by unpleasant dreams. Suddenly I was startled into complete wakefulness by a loud cry which rang thrilling, piercing, and penetrating, through the house. Once before in my life had I been startled in the midst of the night by such a cry of human agony; and that was when in the service of the false Count de Montville. *Then* it appeared to be sufficiently shocking: but heavens! what a cry was this *now*—and in the anguished accents of a female voice! I sprang from the bed, trembling and frightened to a degree that I cannot describe: I huddled on a few clothes in the dark—and rushed forth from my room. That cry had been succeeded by a dead stillness: but now I heard others moving about in the house. It was therefore no delusion of the fancy on my part—for the household had been alarmed by the same cause. From the very first instant—even while that shrill piercing cry seemed still to be vibrating in the air and ringing wildly through my brain—I was struck by the conviction that it emanated from Sybilla. Towards her room therefore did I speed, and met Mrs. Summerly, Emma, and the housemaid (who carried a light) hastening to the same point. They had likewise hurried on some clothing; and dismay, mingled with affright, was upon their countenances. The room-door was locked. Mrs. Summerly rapped vehemently: but there was no answer—and there was no sound within. What was to be done? what had happened? We were all four half frantic with terror and bewilderment. Again did Mrs. Summerly knock; and then we listened. This time we heard Sybilla moving—but slowly, as if painfully raising herself up from the carpet. In a few moments the key turned in the lock—and we entered. As the light of the candle which the housemaid carried in her hand fell upon Sybilla, who was in her night-dress, we saw that she was pale as a ghost—and with a look as wild and frightened as if she had seen one.

"Good heavens, my dearest girl," ejaculated Mrs. Summerly, folding her niece in her arms, "what has happened? what has happened?"

"Only a horrible dream, dear aunt," responded Sybilla in quick and excited accents. "I am truly distressed that I should have disturbed you—"

"But you must have fainted—you must have fallen into a fit—you are as cold as ice!" said Mrs. Summerly, deeply afflicted. "Run and get some wine, Emma. See if there is any hot water in the boiler—and make some negus. Let us get you to bed, dear Sybil!"—and then, when the young lady was deposited in her couch again, Mrs. Summerly lavished upon her the tenderest caresses. "Poor dear girl, how you tremble! how cold you are! Shall I send for the doctor, Sybil love?"

"No, aunt—I shall be better presently," responded Miss Trevanion. "It was a horrible dream," she said again, and with a ghastly look: then for a moment methought her eyes flung a significant glance at me. "I must have fallen out of bed—I remember that I shrieked forth—Oh, how sorry, how truly distressed I am that I have caused all this alarm!"

By this time Mrs. Goldworthy the cook made her appearance; and she was as much terrified and afflicted as the rest of us at what had happened. Mrs. Summerly said all she could think of to soothe her niece's excited feelings: but, Ah! little did the good lady understand the primal cause of what had happened. Emma soon re-appeared with the negus: but Sybilla declared she could not touch it—it would make her sick—her heart heaved against it. Mrs. Summerly, with the kindest intuations, pressed her to drink it: but she could not—and suddenly she exclaimed, "What o'clock is it? tell me what o'clock it is!"

"Never mind the hour, my dear girl," returned her aunt: "compose yourself, love."

"No—do tell me what o'clock it is!" ejaculated Sybilla vehemently.

I instantaneously suspected that she had some special and perhaps fearful motive for asking this question; and hurrying to the toilet-table, I looked at her watch.

"It is exactly ten minutes past one," I said.

Sybilla moaned—but made no remark. Mrs. Summerly evidently thought that her niece's intellects were somewhat unsettled by the horrible fright she had experienced from the alleged dream; and she again wished to send for the doctor: but when she expressed this desire, Miss Trevanion begged and implored that nothing of the kind might be done. She then said that she felt calm and composed now—and thanking her aunt and the servants for their kindness, entreated them to withdraw. Mrs. Summerly urged the impossibility of leaving her alone for the rest of the night: but Sybilla protested so earnestly that she would much prefer being left to herself, that her aunt was compelled to grant her request. This however she did with great reluctance, and not before Sybilla assured her that any opposition to her wishes would only excite her afresh.

We all accordingly withdrew. When I regained my own chamber, I was in such a state of nervous trepidation that I was half inclined to sit up and read for the remainder of the night: but thinking that if I were to do so, I should be very ill in the morning, and that I ought to endeavour to compose my feelings as well as I was able, I lay down to rest again. Slumber did not speedily visit my eyes.

All the incidents of that dream connected with the drowned servant-maid came vividly back to my mind; and I felt assured that it was some similar occurrence—or rather terrible freak of a morbid and highly wrought fancy—that had led to the alarm which had just aroused the entire household.

It was soon after seven in the morning that I repaired to Miss Trevanion's chamber: the door was unlocked, and worthy Mrs. Summerly was already there, standing by her niece's bed-side. At the moment Sybilla was assuring her that she felt much better than could have been expected after the horrible fright she had experienced. The aunt recommended her to have her breakfast in bed—a proposition to which Sybilla would not however accede,—declaring that she longed to take a few turns in the garden, being convinced that the fresh air would do her good. Mrs. Summerly, well pleased to hear her niece talk in a manner which implied the assurance that she would soon get over the shock of the alleged dream, left the chamber; and I was now alone with the young lady. I had already noticed that she was deadly pale—that her eyes were hollow, with a blueish tint around them—that her look was haggard and care-worn—and that even while she was endeavouring to speak cheerfully to her aunt, there was an expression of anguish flitting as it were beneath the surface of that assumed air. But Mrs. Summerly had doubtless failed to observe all this, inasmuch as she was not aware of those causes of intense suffering which existed in the depths of Miss Trevanion's soul. It was with a cold shuddering that I approached the couch, when I found myself alone with her,—that same kind of shuddering, mysterious, deep, and awful, which seizes upon one when advancing to the bed where a corpse lies stretched: for there was on my mind not merely the presentiment, but the absolute certainty that I was about to hear the narrative of something dreadful, whether real or imaginary, that had occurred to Sybilla Trevanion during the past night. She evidently knew what was passing in my mind: she could comprehend the state of my feelings; and she gazed up at me from her pillow with a look so utterly forlorn—so dismal—so dreary, that I burst into tears at this evidence of an illimitable woe.

"Sit down by the bed-side, Mary," she said, her voice now deep and hollow, "and I will endeavour to explain to you what took place last night."

I sat down accordingly. She took my hand and pressed it between both her own, which were very cold, and the muscles of which appeared to move with a mechanical rigidity, rather than with the wonted elasticity of health.

"You remember," she continued, "what took place between us last evening: you have not forgotten the vow that I recorded—the solemn pledge that I made. Perhaps you recollect the precise words that I used? I said that so long as *he* whom I loved breathed the air of this world, I would remain faithful to him. I must now tell you that even as I spoke those words, I felt a strange cold shudder pass through my entire form from head to foot: but I knew that it was imperceptible outwardly, and that therefore you observed it not. It was one of those death-like sensations which strike chill to the heart, yet scarcely ruffle the surface at the time. Immediately after I had done speaking

I assumed an air of cheerfulness, and we talked about books: but of course you were not deceived by my manner, although you considerably and delicately sustained the discourse in the new turn which I had given it. When you left me, there was a sad presentiment of coming evil in my mind."

"Which was most natural, dear Miss Trevanion," I said, "under such painful circumstances."

"Listen, Mary, to what I am about to remark," she continued, "ere I commence the narrative of that dreadful scene which occurred last night. You know that I am superstitious: I do not attempt to conceal that tendency from you. I believe that, under certain circumstances, heaven manifests its interposition with human affairs in a manner more direct than in the ordinary circumstances of life; and it is precisely because these manifestations are so rare and so few persons ever have experience of them, that the world in general is so sceptical as to the possibility or probability of their existence. That dream which I related to you the other day, you must admit to have been at least singular? I call it a dream, because you yourself will have that it was so: to me it has a different sense and interpretation. I believe that it was no delusion of the fancy, but a positive occurrence. But now, let me direct your attention to another circumstance. When contemplating that portrait a week back, the countenance looked out at me with a changing and saddening expression. Was that fancy? or was it a warning? Did nothing occur soon afterwards? In a few days my father came and bade me prepare to accept the suit of Mr. Woodville! Perhaps you will say that all this can be explained by the argument of *coincidence*: at all events we will not dispute the subject now. Last evening I lay down in this bed with the certainty that something would occur before morning—but what I knew not. I prayed long and fervently that if heaven purposed to manifest its power by any direct revelation towards myself, I might be armed with the fortitude to meet it becomingly, and if it were a calamity, to endure it with resignation. I did feel strengthened when I had put up this prayer; and I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep. I had left one of the wax candles burning upon the toilet-table; and as slumber refused to visit my eyes, I thought that probably the light might help to keep me awake. I therefore got out and extinguished it. It was then half-past eleven—for I looked at my watch on the table. Soon after returning to bed, I fell asleep. How long I slept, I know not: nor did I awake suddenly—but by degrees, and with a slowly growing consciousness that something dreadful was about to occur. I felt very cold, and seemed totally incapable of motion—as if I were in a trance or tetanos—physically dead, but with all my mental functions fully alive within me. My eyes were fixed upon the opening in the curtains by the side of the bed. At first, when I thus awoke, the chamber was almost completely dark; but gradually it appeared that a feebly glimmering light shed itself through the room, as if the moon had appeared from behind a cloud and was pouring its cold silvery lustre through the casement. And yet methought that this light, though feeble and ineffectual, was not partial, but general—not shedding itself in a particular spot, but throughout the chamber, even into the very corners. Then, as I lay

gazing in mute and motionless consternation upon the opening in the curtains, a form gradually appeared there—at first dim and misty, like a wreath of blue cloud, but with human shapeliness. It gradually acquired consistency, and settled into the countenance and figure of him whom I love—the original of that portrait. Yes—it was *he*, that adored and absent one, who stood by the side of my couch last night!"

Here Miss Trevanion ceased for a few moments; and covering her face with her hands, she remained buried in profoundest thought. I spoke not a word: I longed to hear the remainder of her strange wild narrative—and I sincerely hoped that the circumstances thereof would prove of a nature to permit the argument that it was all naught but a feverish though dreadful dream.

"Yes—it was *he* who stood by my bedside," she slowly continued—and slowly likewise did she remove her white hands from her almost whiter countenance. "I cannot explain the feelings which arose in my soul at this spectacle. I knew that it could not be *he* in person, but only in the spirit; and my sensation was that of ineffable tenderness, mingled with awful apprehension. I felt assured that he was no more; and yet I was not *afraid*, in the usual sense of the word, at his appearance there. *He* was in his full uniform—that of a lieutenant—precisely as you have seen him represented in the miniature-portrait: but, as also in the portrait, he had nothing upon his head. His countenance was deadly pale—his look profoundly sad. His eyes were bent upon me in mournful tenderness: but they were glassy, and with the film of death upon them. There was no impulse in my mind to stretch forth my arms towards him, because I could too well divine wherefore he visited me thus. My physical energies were paralysed: I could neither move nor speak. O Mary! conceive the agony of such a condition! For more than a minute—yes, I am sure that it was more—did he stand thus gazing upon me: then all in an instant the light disappeared—and with it the form of my beloved one vanished. Utter darkness filled the chamber; and at the same moment I recovered all my physical powers. I sprang up in the wildest affright—I remember that a rending cry thrilled from my lips—and I fell headlong from the bed. Consciousness must have abandoned me at the moment: for I recollected nothing more until I was slowly aroused by a loud sharp rapping at the door—and all in a moment everything that had occurred flashed back to my mind. There are instants, no doubt, in the life of all persons when the necessity of gathering up the whole of one's fortitude for a particular emergency strikes upon the sense; and so it was with me. With a preterhuman effort did I nerve myself, in that swift brief instant, to encounter as well as I was able, the looks and the questions of those who sought admittance: and I unlocked the door. You know the rest: for you entered with my aunt and the servants."

Miss Trevanion thus concluded her narrative; and it was with a feeling of relief, even bordering upon delight, that I found myself enabled to regard it only as a dream. I had feared until it was terminated that it might involve circumstances more deeply tinged with a superstitious colouring, and calculated to bewilder and startle even myself: but

it was not so—and while profoundly commiserating the unhappy young lady whose imagination was so disturbed, yet I experienced the consolation of knowing, or at least hoping, that there was nothing real in the cause of her alarm.

"You can now understand, Mary," she continued, "wherefore I so energetically desired to be informed what o'clock it was when you and the others entered the room. You told me it was ten minutes past one. How many minutes, think you, must have elapsed from the moment when you were startled by that wild cry of mine, until I admitted you into the chamber?"

"As nearly as I can guess, some eight or ten minutes," was my answer.

"Then it was at one o'clock that I beheld him standing by the side of my couch. And this," continued Sybilla, in a deep tone and with thoughtful air, "is the Tenth of October. Look, Mary, amongst the books upon the side-table: and you will find a small Geography. Give it to me."

I immediately complied with Miss Trevanion's request, wondering however what use she intended to make of the volume, or how any portion of its contents could apply to the solemn subject of our discourse. She took it from my hand—sat up in bed—and opened the book. Facing the title page there was a dial, set round with figures marking the twenty-four hours of the day—or rather with the twelve hours twice set forth in due rotation. A revolving circle of card, separate from the dial, and made to fix in it by means of a thread serving as a pivot, was marked with the names of the capital cities or chief towns of the various countries of the world.

"Now, Mary," resumed Miss Trevanion, "by bringing the name of London to touch exactly upon one o'clock at night, we shall discover what the contemporaneous hour must have been at Madras."

"Madras?" I ejaculated: for it was there that my own well-beloved Eustace Quentin was stationed with his regiment, and where he must have arrived some four or five months back: and then again did the thought flash to my mind that the object of Sybilla's devoted affection was an officer in that self-same regiment.

"Yes, Mary—I said Madras," rejoined Miss Trevanion, evidently thinking that my ejaculation was merely one of astonishment, and had no deeper meaning. "There!" she continued: "you perceive that when it is *one o'clock at night* in London, it is *six o'clock in the morning* at Madras. And therefore," she added, in tones so solemnly mournful, so replete with an awful sadness that for the instant they struck me with a deep superstitious feeling,—"whatever has happened to the object of my devoted love, will prove to have occurred *at six o'clock in the morning of the Tenth of October!*"

With these words she gave me back the book, which I deposited upon the table whence I had taken it.

"After my aunt, yourself, and the others had left me last night," continued Sybilla, "sleep did not visit my eyes. I lay thinking—but, Oh! in what sad and mournful reflection—upon the supernatural revelation which I had received. I feel convinced that *he*—the beloved one—is no more. Nothing can extirpate this conviction from my

mind, save and except his own appearance as a living man—and this, alas! I know to be impossible. He is dead, Mary: but how his inestimable life has been lost, I cannot say—I dare not conjecture. Perhaps you are surprised to find that I do not weep—that I am not a prey to the wildest grief? But no: mine is now a sorrow too profound even for tears. Sorrow finds itself a vent in tears: but mine can have no vent. Sorrow relieves itself in the gushing tide of anguish: but mine can have no such issue. It is a woe as sacred as it is profound—a woe to be treasured up in the altar of my heart—to be preserved for ever in that sanctuary. And there are circumstances, too," she continued, "which must force me to conceal it to the utmost of my power from the eyes of the world. Ah! how sad it is to be compelled to dissemble thus! But I must endeavour to do so. To you only, Mary, must all this be made known. Yes—to another—for I have resolved to explain myself to a certain extent to my father when he comes this day: so that I may not seem altogether an undutiful daughter, and likewise that I may move his heart to sympathize with me for the reasons which will force me to refuse the sacrifice of myself, even though by my refusal his own ruin may be consummated."

Having thus spoken, Sybilla Trevanion rose from the bed and commenced the usual process of the toilet. As she sat before the mirror, while I assisted in the arrangement of her magnificent black hair, I beheld the reflection of her countenance in that glass, and saw that its expression was that of a calm and placid resignation. Nevertheless, it was mingled with a touching sadness: but no tear fell from her eyes—no sob agitated her bosom.

"I have been thinking," she said, after a long silence, "that if the worst should happen in respect to my poor father, it will be a sweet and holy solace to be experienced by me for the remainder of my life—which will, however, be short—to devote myself entirely to the dutiful task of soothing him in his altered circumstances—of mitigating the pangs of comparative poverty—and of doing my best to enliven the new and humble home, wherever it may be, to which we shall have to remove. Surely he will be touched by these evidences of filial devotedness on my part? Surely he will not consider his daughter selfish in refusing to sacrifice herself to Mr. Woodville, when she sacrifices herself to the whole and sole care of administering to her father's comforts? And yet I fear, Mary, that it will be a painful scene which I shall this day have to encounter—a sad ordeal through which I shall have to pass—when my father comes to receive my decision! I believe you have never seen my father? No. Alas! his temper is irritable—he has been accustomed ever to have his own way, and in most respects to make his will have the effect of law. I grieve to add likewise, that, if thwarted, he can speak sternly and harshly, or passionately and vehemently; and it is for this that I fear our interview of to-day will be a terrible ordeal for me. How he will keep its objects secret from my aunt, I know not: for it will be impossible that a discourse of such gravity and importance can take place in the garden, where any passers-by may overhear what is said. But perhaps he will no longer deem it necessary to retain all



these circumstances secret from his sister-in-law? We shall see. Alas! would that this day were gone: would that I were twenty-four hours older!"

"Will you permit me, Miss Trevanion," I said, "now that you are so calm and can talk so collectedly upon everything——"

"But I have shown no excitement this morning," she interrupted me quietly.

"No, Miss—it is true: but when you first explained to me the incidents of the past night, you were perhaps more completely under their influence than you are at the present moment."

"Not so, Mary. That which you call an influence, is a positive and unconquerable conviction established in my soul; and as I have already stated, it can only be destroyed by an event which, alas! I feel to be impossible—I mean by the return of him who can return no more!"

"But you will take steps, Miss Trevanion," I

said, "to assure yourself of the truth of this sad impression which has been left upon your mind?"

"Depend upon it, Mary, that in four or five months, when we can next receive tidings from Madras, that impression will be but too mournfully confirmed:"—and now methought that the reflection of Sybilla's countenance in the mirror showed that for an instant her lips quivered with an inward anguish: but it was only for an instant—and then they were compressed as if to keep back an outburst of affliction.

"I was about to ask, Miss Trevanion," I resumed, "whether you will permit me to make a few observations upon the incidents of the past night?"—then, after a brief pause, finding that she did not interrupt me, I went on to say, "On a recent occasion you declared that you could not flatter me; and now I must observe that I am equally incapable of speaking fulsomely to yourself. When therefore

I allude to the natural strength of your mind, the power of your intellect, your extensive reading, and your capability of serious and logical reflection, I am speaking of facts and paying no idle compliments. I pray you therefore—most earnestly and most beseechingly do I pray you, to read the incident of last night by the lustre of that lamp which burns with so strong a power in your mind. Pardon me for expressing my conviction that it was a dream—nothing but a dream. If any token of its reality had been left behind, it would be very different; and I am neither so egotistically self-sufficient nor so impertinently dogmatical as to insist that certain things cannot be, merely because I do not choose to believe in them. I am as open to conviction as any one; and if it were satisfactorily shown to me that there is just ground for putting faith in supernatural appearances, I would yield to the force of argument. Oh, Miss Trevanion!" I exclaimed, "woo and cherish hope—but do not abandon yourself to despair! Believe me—and God grant that my own belief is the correct one—God grant it, I say, for your sake—you have been cruelly troubled and frightened by a vision conjured up by a fevered fancy!"

"I know, Mary," was Sybilla's mournful reply, "that you speak with the kindest intentions and from the best motives. But nothing can alter my own conviction—save and except the event which this very conviction tells me is impossible. He is gone, Mary—he is gone—and we shall meet no more in this life. In the depth of my affliction it is a holy and sacred solace that his spirit should have flown back to the object of his love at the very moment when it left its earthly tenement for ever. Hope is dead within me; and it would be wrong to say that I am now filled with despair, because despair is likewise past, and has left an eternal sorrow behind. You will not see me weep—you will not perhaps even see me pine away. Mine is no common nature. I believe in destiny, because I believe in Providence and in the immutable will of heaven. Whatever my destiny may be, I shall fulfil it. Nay, more—I shall accept it with resignation and with Christian cheerfulness. Receive my best, my sincerest thanks, Mary—the expression of my most heartfelt gratitude—for your generous endeavours to re-awaken hope within me. And now we will dwell no more, at least in words, upon the subject. Give me a black dress. I dare not assume such mourning apparel as would best become my sense of his loss, because the secret must be kept. But so far as I may, will I suffer my dress to be in unison with the feelings of my heart."

The toilet was finished; and Miss Trevanion, quitting the bed-chamber, descended to the breakfast-parlour, where Mrs. Summerly was awaiting her presence.

CHAPTER CXVII.

MR. TREVANION AND HIS DAUGHTER.

A LITTLE after mid-day a handsome carriage stopped at the garden-gate; and a gentleman, whom I of course suspected to be Mr. Trevanion, alighted. I was engaged in Sybilla's room at the time; and as this was in the front of the house, I

had a full opportunity of observing that gentleman. He was a man of middle stature, apparently about sixty years of age, with gray hair; and so far as I could judge from that distance, with a serious look bordering upon sternness. He walked slowly, but with firmness of step; and therefore I concluded that this deliberation of pace arose from a thoughtfulness of mind rather than from a physical decrepitude. The carriage drove away to put up at some neighbouring stable-establishment; and Mr. Trevanion entered the house. Most sincerely did I pity the unfortunate Sybilla: for instead of being enabled to give her sire a heartfelt and cordial reception, I knew full well that she could only regard his visit as one fraught with dismal fears and dire forebodings for herself.

In about half-an-hour, and while I was still engaged in Sybilla's chamber, she made her appearance to put on her walking apparel.

"My father is come," she said to me, in a low voice—a voice that was thus subdued by the power of her feelings; "and he has invited me to take a ramble with him in the adjacent fields. Within the hour that is about to pass, Mary, if you think of me, you may say to yourself that I am undergoing a very sad ordeal."

"Be assured, Miss Trevanion," I answered, "that I shall think of you! Indeed I could not possibly banish yourself and everything connected with you from my thoughts, even if I exerted all my power to do so."

She pressed my hand, and quitted the room. A few minutes afterwards I beheld her issue forth, leaning on her father's arm: they threaded the garden together, and were soon out of sight. Two hours elapsed ere they returned; and during this interval I felt as restless and uneasy as if I myself were to suffer by the result of whatsoever might take place between them. When they re-appeared, I noticed that Sybilla was not now leaning on her father's arm, but was walking by his side; and not a word seemed to be passing between them as they thus retraced their way through the garden. Sybilla immediately came up-stairs, without first entering the parlour where Mrs. Summerly was seated; and the moment she entered the chamber, where I had remained for the best part of the time during her absence, I at once perceived by her countenance that she had been fearfully agitated. Indeed, methought I read sufficient indications thereon that the scene with her father had been even of a more terrible character than she herself in her worst fears had anticipated. She did not immediately speak; and when I had proceeded to divest her of her bonnet and pelisse, she sat down upon the couch at the foot of the bed, fixing her eyes on the floor, and falling into a deep abstraction. Having no farther occasion to stay in the room, I was about to retire—when, with an abrupt start she called me back and made me sit down by her side.

"It has been a fearful ordeal," she at once said—and there was bitterness as well as affliction in her accents. "I was prepared for some of it, but not for so much: I could not have believed that my father would act thus. I told you that he was sometimes harsh—sometimes passionate: but I could not fancy that it was in his nature to speak as he has spoken to me within the two hours past. On

going forth together," continued Miss Trevanion, after a short pause, "he at once led me across the fields at the back of the house. We reached the canal, along the bank of which we walked for some time in silence. Suddenly my father stopped short, and looked all around. No habitation was nigh, and no human being was near us: we were as much alone there, as if in an apartment by ourselves. Then he asked me to what decision I had come? I besought him to listen while I revealed a secret hitherto altogether unsuspected by him. I proceeded to tell him that for eighteen months past my affections had been engaged to another: I told him who that *other* was—and how, on account of his poverty; our loves had been veiled in secrecy. My father listened in mute astonishment: it was indeed true that the circumstance had never even been remotely suspected by himself. He had been personally acquainted with him of whom I spoke; and I appealed to him whether he was not in every way worthy of my admiration, and my devoted love? No—not in every way worthy in my father's eyes: because he was but a poor lieutenant in the army, with naught besides his pay, and no powerful aristocratic interest to advance him in his career. And then, Mary," proceeded Miss Trevanion, the accents of her voice becoming more solemn than they had hitherto been, "I told my father the incident of last night. Yes, I told him everything, as I this morning told it to you. I said that I knew the object of my heart's unchangeable love was no more—that he had perished in the far-off clime to which his duty had compelled him to repair—but had perished in a manner of which as yet I could form no conjecture, and relative to which many months must elapse before the details could be received. My father heard this portion of my address in thoughtful astonishment: he was evidently much struck by it. He said nothing for some minutes; and we walked together in silence, along the pathway on the bank of the canal. At length he spoke. He did not attempt to dissuade me from the belief impressed upon my mind: he himself appeared to be embued with the awful solemnity of the incident which I had narrated. But if he used no argument, neither did he proffer consolation. He proceeded to give me a deeper insight than he had previously done into the state of his affairs. It appears that his estate is mortgaged to the utmost limit, and that all the revenue which it produces will now barely suffice to pay the interest of the debt secured upon it. I do not understand much of these things, Mary; but I comprehend sufficient to perceive that my father's circumstances are desperate indeed. The persons holding the principal mortgage, now require their money; and it has been with the greatest difficulty that my father has obtained a delay. It moreover appears that Mr. Woodville, who is fully acquainted with his position, and who is enormously rich, has offered to advance my father the entire sum necessary to pay off his liabilities. But it is upon that condition with which you are already acquainted: and this condition my father repeated to me ere now. Yes, Mary—my own father gave me to understand—*me*, his daughter—that he seeks to barter me at a price—to sell me as a wife to the man who will give his gold to purchase me! O heavens! what would the world think of such a father?

what would the world think of that other man who would consent to become a husband upon such terms?"

Miss Trevanion paused for a few moments, while her looks showed how deeply her soul revolted from the contemplation of her sire's selfishness and her suitor's grovelling meanness.

"Is it not horrible?" she exclaimed with a sudden access of excitement: "is it not fearful to think of? Oh! no wonder that my father should feel ashamed to breathe even a single word of all this to the ear of my worthy, benevolent, and right-minded aunt. I could not restrain my indignation. I asked him what he would think of his daughter if she consented to become the wife of a man who sought to purchase her with gold?—of a man, too, who knowing that he was detested, would nevertheless avail himself of her father's necessities that he might force her to accompany him to the altar? Then my father, while admitting that he himself entertained a mean and miserable opinion of Mr. Woodville, pointed to the painful imperiousness of the circumstances that ruled him: and, O Mary! all my indignation changed into the deepest grief, when I heard my sire proclaim that if he were not saved by my means he should sink broken-hearted into the grave! For more than two hundred years has that estate been in his family: the name of Trevanion is an old and a time-honoured one in the county of Essex; and my father besought and implored me to save it from consummate degradation and dishonour in his person. He said that he was well aware of the immensity of the sacrifice he demanded at my hands; but still he implored me to consent to that sacrifice, as the only alternative to save him from utter ruin. He explained to me what would be the effects of my refusal—that in a few weeks' time his creditors would take possession of the estate—that they would drive him forth from the home of his forefathers—that he would be turned adrift upon the wide world utterly penniless—that all his personal property and the very means of living would pass away from him—and that if this catastrophe should ensue, he would not have the wherewith to pay for the hire of the humblest lodging nor for a morsel of food. Such, Mary, was the direful tale he told me; and producing the papers from his pocket, he bade me read them to satisfy myself that he had exaggerated none of the evils of his position. But I did not insult him so far as to appear to doubt his word. It was very sad, Mary: you can appreciate all the anguish of the position in which I was placed."

"I can, indeed, dear Miss Trevanion!" was my answer. "I do enter fully into all you must have suffered!"

"Having thus explained to me his position," continued Sybilla, "my father asked me again to what decision I could now come? I replied by a question. I inquired whether he was prepared to build up his fortunes on the ruins of his daughter's happiness? *Not happiness*: for that is a feeling which I may never know again—but upon whatsoever small amount of peace of mind and resignation may have been left to me? I represented that if our circumstances were to change from riches and splendour to poverty and a humble lodging, I would exert myself to the very utmost of all my energies, mental and physical, to render his lot as endurable as possible. I reminded him that, thanks to his bounteous

rare, I had received a good education—that I was not deficient in accomplishments—and that I would cheerfully turn them to a good account. I vowed my readiness to toil like a slave—to work as a servant, if needful—to rise early and go to bed late—to perform the most menial offices—to do, in fine, all that lay in my power to earn a livelihood for us both, and contribute to his comfort. I bade him not despair of the success of my endeavours to provide a home, which if humble, at least should be respectable: and I asked him whether such a condition as this would not be preferable to the retaining possession of his domain and mansion at the sacrifice of his daughter to Mr. Woodville?”

“You spoke, Miss Trevanion,” I said, in enthusiastic admiration of the young lady’s conduct, “in a way that did honour to you as a daughter; and such behaviour, so noble and so generous, deserved a better treatment than I fear you subsequently experienced.”

“One would have thought so—one would have hoped so!” rejoined Sybilla, in a deeply mournful voice. “But my father, although he had listened to me in silence, if not with patience, was inexorable in pressing his own views. He repeated that it would be the death of him to be ejected from his estate—that he never could hold up his head again in the world—that he could not survive the degradation and dishonour to which his name would be brought down. He then urged me to give my consent. He said that as I had received so positive an assurance that the object of my first and dearest affections had ceased to exist, there was all the less reason for persisting in refusal. He represented that if I would only give him a written promise which he might show to Mr. Woodville,—that when after the lapse of some months I should have obtained the certainty that he whom I loved was no more, I would bestow my hand upon this Mr. Woodville,—it was all he asked. That written assurance, he said, would prove sufficient to induce Mr. Woodville to hold out to the creditors the prospect of their demands being satisfied; and that thus, without any indelicate precipitation, but with every possible regard for my own feelings, the impending ruin could be averted. Such were my father’s representations—such were his entreaties—and such were his urgent pleadings. Still I refused—still I argued with him upon the sad and mournful topic. I assured him that it was my firm intention to remain for ever faithful to the memory of him to whom my love was devoted—and that I should consider myself to be guilty of a crime if I accompanied another to the altar. I represented that our’s could be no ordinary affection—no common love—since heaven itself had manifested its direct intervention by sending the spirit of the deceased to reveal to me his loss. Then ensued a terrible scene on the bank of that canal where we were walking at the time. My father grew white with rage. He trembled from head to foot—but his eyes flashed fire. O heavens! that I should be thus compelled to speak of the author of my being! But it is the truth that I am telling you, Mary—distressing and heart-rending though this truth be! My father upbraided me bitterly as a disobedient daughter—as a daughter who would sacrifice nothing to save her own sire from utter ruin. He accused me of selfishness,—

telling me that I would stand idly by and behold him plunged deep down into the vortex of ruin, rather than stretch forth a saving hand. Then with his upbraidings were mingled the most terrible invectives and the most horrible threats. But I cannot—I must not—I dare not, dwell longer upon that dreadful scene: it makes me shudder even as I think of it now!”

And the unfortunate Sybilla was shuddering visibly; and as she pressed my hand, which she had taken and retained for some minutes past, it was with convulsive violence, even to hurt me.

“And now, Mary,” she continued, “you must be anxious to learn how this ended. I know not whether I ought to blush in your presence as I tell you: I know not whether you will think me criminally feeble and wickedly weak—or whether you will be inclined to make due allowances for me, and admit that I adopted the only course which circumstances left for me to pursue. Ah! you know how much I had gone through during the previous twelve hours: you can imagine that my mind had become attenuated—my spirit crushed; and you will not wonder if I tell you that I was stupified and dismayed, cast down and overpowered, by that fearful torrent of mingled upbraidings and invectives, reproaches and threats. It came upon me with the violence of a hurricane—with the fury of a tempest—with the awful horror of a crashing storm. Had the thunders of heaven burst forth over my head and the forked lightnings played vividly around me—had the earth trembled beneath my feet, and the waters of that river on whose bank I stood, risen up around in huge waves to engulf me—I could not have been more completely overwhelmed with mingled consternation and terror. Altogether, Mary, it was a scene such as for the honour of humanity I hope is seldom enacted upon earth—a scene which God grant that you, my dear girl, may never behold even from a distance, much less become an actress in it—or rather I should say, its victim! For its victim was I made.”

Sybilla stopped short and looked me full in the face, anxiously to read the impression her words had made upon me, and what I thought of her now.

“Ah!” she exclaimed, throwing her arms round my neck and embracing me affectionately, “I see, my dear friend—for such you are, and such I must henceforth call you—that you pity me. Oh, I am indeed to be pitied—deeply, profoundly to be pitied! For in yielding to my father, I feel that I have committed an impious and desecrating crime against the image of him to whose memory I ought ever to remain faithful. But the die is cast: it is done, Mary. I was not so strong as I hoped and thought to be: or perhaps I should say that my father was more pitiless, more merciless, than I could possibly have foreseen. But again I say, the die is cast; and I have consented. Now, Mary, do you despise me? do you hate me?”

“Impossible, dear Miss Trevanion!” I exclaimed, now embracing her of my own accord. “I sympathize with you so sincerely—I commiserate your misfortunes so deeply, that I can only entertain one feeling towards you—and that is friendship!”

“Oh, thanks, Mary—a thousand thanks, for these generous assurances!” and Sybilla again kissed me affectionately. “Let us reflect for a few

moments," she continued, her looks and voice suddenly becoming grave and solemn, "upon all that has happened since yesterday. Last evening—here, in this room—in your presence—and of my own accord, did I vow before attesting heaven, that so long as *he* breathed the air of this world, I would remain faithful to him alike in thought and deed. Was it not strange—was it not awfully singular that within a few hours afterwards, in the depth of the night upon the threshold of which I was already standing when I recorded that vow, the revelation should be sent by heaven that the object thereof was no more? Thus did I find myself suddenly absolved from my vow: or rather, it was annihilated by the same circumstance that annihilated all my hopes of happiness at the same time. And then, comparatively but a few hours afterwards, did I find myself kneeling at the feet of my father—beseeching and imploring that he would recall those upbraidings—that he would desist from those invectives which he was levelling against me—and promising that I would do all he required. Yes, Mary, those are the incidents of a few swift brief hours. How much may take place in the lapse of a short time! what changes of circumstance and feeling! And now would you ask what my position is? According to the promise I have given to my father, I am about to pen a solemn pledge, that if at the expiration of a few months tidings should arrive from Madras that the object of my love is indeed no more, I will bestow my hand upon Mr. Woodville; but that if, on the contrary, so much happiness is reserved for me that it shall transpire that *he* is still breathing the air of this world, then is my promise to be considered null and of no effect!"

Sybilla had given utterance to this last sentence in a tone that was scarcely audible, and with eyes bent down,—her accents and looks thus indicating the real state of her feelings far more eloquently than the most passionate outburst of anguish could possibly have done.

"I am to remain here for the present," she resumed: "but it is on the condition that I say nothing to my aunt of all that has taken place between my father and myself. Nor even, without this injunction, should I do so. Wherefore should I afflict that kind-hearted and affectionate relative? wherefore should I disturb her in the even tenour of her own happy way? But, ah! I stipulated with my father that I should remain here at least for the present, for several reasons: first because I would avoid the chance of encountering the detested Woodville—secondly because I have a friend and confidante in you, dear Mary—and thirdly because it gives me a melancholy pleasure to occupy this room which is now hallowed by the associations of the incident of last night. And, Oh! if *his* spirit be hovering near at this moment, he will pardon—he will forgive me, for having yielded to the inexorable will of my father;—and looking down into the depths of my heart, which has no disguise and can practise no concealment to the invisible beings in the world beyond the grave, *he* will read there the sincerity of that love with which his memory is revered, and the truth of those motives which have actuated me in succumbing to an imperious necessity. No, the spirit of the departed cannot look angrily upon me! Faithful as I have been to *him*, so am I now performing the part of an obedient—perhaps

too obedient daughter. I shall save my sire from ruin; and even in the midst of the bitter sense of that self-sacrifice by which this salvation will have been wrought, I shall at least enjoy the solace of feeling that the author of my existence can no longer upbraid nor reproach me. And now let me perform the promise that I have made."

With these words Sybilla rose from the couch on which we were seated together; and placing herself at the side table, where there were writing materials, she penned a few lines upon a sheet of paper. This she folded up and placed in her bosom, saying, as she prepared to quit the room, "I shall now proceed to give this document to my father—and thus far all will be accomplished!"

It was with a cold firm voice that she spoke; and flinging a look of grateful affection upon me, she issued forth from the chamber. There however I still remained for some time, pondering in profound melancholy upon all that I had heard. Mr. Trevanion remained to dinner: but I noticed that there was no music that evening. He departed in his carriage at about nine o'clock; and at an early hour Sybilla retired to rest. Did she sleep well that night? Alas, poor girl—I fear not.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

JEALOUSY AND QUARRELS.

A FEW days after the incidents which I have been relating, I was delighted by having a letter put into my hands addressed in the well-known writing of Eustace. It had been delivered in the first instance at the post-office at Deal, to which it was addressed, and had been re-directed to me at my present place of abode. It was dated from Madras, about four months and a half back—and commenced by acknowledging the receipt of my first letter, written from Kingston Grange;—for the others I had despatched could not have yet arrived at their destination when Eustace had sent off the epistle which I now received. He was well in health, and declared that he sustained his spirits as cheerfully as he was able by the contemplation of the hope I had held out, "that at the expiration of two or three years from the time of his departure, I would join him in India and become his wife." He assured me of his continued and undying affection, expressing his conviction that mine was equally devoted and imperishable. He gave me a graphic description of Madras and the surrounding district—of the habits and customs of the natives—and of many interesting particulars in respect to oriental life. He likewise sketched the characters of some of his brother-officers, but not indulging in any ill-natured satire or malignant sarcasm, because of this his generous disposition was incapable. The following passage occurred in Captain Quentin's letter:—

"My most intimate friend and constant companion is Lieutenant Henry Crawford, a very amiable and excellent young man. His disposition assimilates much with my own. *Like* me, he avoids sitting late at the mess-table; and I think that without meaning, my dear Mary, to pay myself an ill-deserved compliment, I may truthfully declare that we are the two steadiest officers of the regiment. Henry Crawford is about twenty-five years of age, and remarkably handsome. He has fine dark hair and most intelligent eyes; while a certain pensive-

ness gives an additional interest to his well-formed features. That pensiveness is not, I am inclined to believe, naturally interwoven with the expression of his face, but arises from a similar circumstance to that which often makes me feel pensive likewise. We have been to a certain extent communicative towards each other; I have confessed to him that there is one in England whom I dearly and fondly love, and by whom I have the consciousness of being beloved in return; and Henry Crawford has made a similar revelation. I have not however mentioned your name, dear Mary; and Crawford, doubtless for equally good reasons of his own, has maintained a like reserve. But often and often do we sit together conversing of our absent loved ones; and as if the coincidence should be still more remarkable, he tells me that the object of his attachment is about the same age as yourself, dear Mary—that she has superb black hair and fine dark eyes—that her complexion is naturally pale—that her features have the Grecian cast—that she is tall, and with a beautifully modelled figure. Don't think, my dearest girl, that I mean to offer you any fulsome flattery or pay you any silly compliments; because I am well aware that your mind is too elevated to regard the former, and that you have no vanity to be pleased by the latter. But *this* I may say—that the object of Henry Crawford's devoted affection cannot be very unlike yourself, so far as personal appearance is concerned.

"Henry is of a far more romantic turn of mind than I am; and herein there is a dissimilitude between us. He is exceedingly superstitious; and he tells me that in this respect he resembles her for whom he sighs continually. He believes in preternatural warnings—and, I think, even in apparitions. Often do we argue upon this subject: but that belief has taken such a strong hold upon his mind that it cannot be shaken, much less destroyed. He tells me that previous to his departure from England to accompany the regiment to India,—and during the last anguished farewell interview between his beloved one and himself,—they, in the deep despondency of their feelings, came to a strange and fanciful agreement. No: I should rather call it a solemnly awful one—for such it must be in the estimation of those who are superstitiously inclined. It was to the effect, that if one should die during the long separation which seemed imminent, he or she (as the case might be) should appear in the spirit to the other at the moment when the soul took wing, and thus announce the melancholy occurrence. To this agreement did they arrive in the full conviction of the possibility of its being carried out—and that should the fatal eventuality arise, heaven would grant permission for the fulfilment of the compact. I have argued with Henry Crawford upon this subject: but he is proof against all reasoning. In every other respect he is the most intelligent of men; and is not only well read, but possesses a fund of knowledge that renders his conversation alike interesting and instructive.

"I know—and you also, dear Mary, have no doubt learnt from books—that the most talented individuals have frequently been the most superstitious—and that such compacts as this which I have been describing, have often been made between beloved relatives or very dear friends. I do not go so far as to say that there is anything positively wicked in such agreements; inasmuch as the apology for them is to be found in the fact that they arise from a pure and conscientious faith in the possibility of their fulfilment: and indeed, they serve as the evidence of a deep religious feeling. Therefore they can scarcely be blamed: but I think it is unfortunate for fine intellects to be on this particular point so warped as to give credence to such superstitions. It is not only unfortunate to contemplate as a spectacle, but for the individuals themselves. Now, mark the difference which exists between Henry Crawford and myself, when conversing of our beloved absent ones. He is oppressed with the melancholy apprehension that he shall never see the object of his affection any more; whereas I, on the other hand, speak hopefully, and on such occasions with a real heartfelt cheerfulness in respect to yourself. I am truly afraid that if my poor friend Crawford remains many years severed from her whose image fills his heart,

he will fall into a gloominess of disposition from which there will be no revival. Do not infer from this observation, dear Mary, that I feel myself possessed of the power to endure with patience or resignation a prolonged separation from you. No—very far from that! But at all events I should not torture myself with the gloomiest forebodings and the darkest apprehensions, without any visible or justifiable cause. Instead of suffering imagination to soar upward with ideas of what heaven may permit should death separate us, I prefer fixing my faith and hope in what Providence may be mercifully led to do for us in the present life—preserving us for each other, and destining us to meet again at no very distant interval, so that our love may be crowned with joy and happiness."

I need quote no more from the letter which I had received from Eustace: the reader has already no doubt understood wherefore I have transcribed that passage at all. I had not read half-way through it, before the suspicion arose in my mind that Henry Crawford was Sybilla Trevanion's lover; and ere I reached the end, this suspicion was changed into positive certainty. But why had she never mentioned his name to me? Wherefore, when unbosoming herself so unreservedly, had she kept that *one* fact a secret? There had frequently been an indistinct and vague thought flitting in my mind, that she had not told me quite *all* the history of the past—that there was something she had left unrevealed. I remembered her anxiety to assure herself at the time that I had not read whatsoever inscription there might be at the back of the miniature-portrait; and I reflected that she had never offered to show me what that inscription was. But that this same Henry Crawford, the intimate friend of my Eustace, was the object of her adoring worship, I had not the slightest doubt. As I continued meditating upon the coincidence, I remembered that Sybilla had never told me of that mystic and superstitious compact which she had made with her lover, and which Eustace had described. Perhaps she thought it was something too solemnly sacred to be breathed to the ears of even one whom she had chosen to make her friend: or perhaps she saw that I myself was so little prone to superstitious belief, that I should think lightly of her intelligence if she communicated that fact. But now, with the knowledge thereof thus conveyed to me, I could full well understand wherefore Sybilla had been so deeply impressed with the conviction that the apparition of her lover by her bedside was no dream, but a positive reality. Alas, poor young lady! she beheld in the incident the fatal fulfilment of the agreement made in the anguished hour of parting; and it was no wonder that she should believe her lover was no more. But still I myself continued to regard the occurrence as a mere dream; and most sincerely did I hope that after the lapse of a few months, tidings would arrive from India to prove that Henry Crawford was still breathing the air of this world.

I did not for a moment think of mentioning to Sybilla the discovery I had made in respect to him whom she loved. In the first place, since her father's departure she had carefully avoided recurring to the sad topic: in the second place, I did not choose to reveal to any one the circumstance of my engagement with Eustace Quentin, seeing how much it had already prejudiced him with his parents: and thirdly, if I had spoken to Miss Trevanion con-

cerning this matter, I could not well have avoided showing her Captain Quentin's letter—and then she would have seen how unhappy Henry Crawford was rendering himself. Therefore I said nothing upon the subject; and Sybilla had not the slightest reason to suspect that I knew any more relative to herself and her lover than she of her own accord had chosen to tell me.

A few days after the receipt of Captain Quentin's letter, I was gratified by one from Mrs. Kingston. It was in reply to a note I had recently written, asking her if there were any objection to my paying a visit to Miss Maitland, as I was most anxious to see that unfortunate young lady again. Mrs. Kingston wrote in the kindest terms. She told me that her cousin Laura was improving under the professional care in which she had been placed—that there was every reason to suppose she would be restored to her friends in a few months—but at present it was deemed advisable she should see no one the recognition of whom would conjure up the most painful reminiscences. Mrs. Kingston concluded by saying that she did not wish to deprive of my services those who had been fortunate enough to obtain them; but she assured me that if circumstances should again render it necessary for me to seek a situation or a home, I should always experience a kind and hearty welcome at the Grange.

The end of my second month at Mrs. Summerly's abode arrived: October was drawing towards a close—and the old lady bade me recollect that if I chose to avail myself of it, my turn had again come for a day's holiday. I had been looking forward to this occasion for a renewal of my visit to Margaret Street; and accordingly, on a fine bright forenoon—one of those delightful days which Autumn sometimes gives forth in its struggle with approaching Winter—I set out on a renewed attempt to obtain an interview with my sister. On reaching the house in Margaret Street, I found the footman, in his handsome livery, standing at the door conversing with some other male domestic; and the moment he beheld me, he said, "Mr. and Mrs. Selden have returned: they are up-stairs, Miss."

I accordingly ascended towards the drawing-room—but with a beating heart—anxious as to the result of my visit, and perhaps entertaining more fear than hope. The door was standing a little ajar; and just as I approached it—my feet moving noiselessly over the thick carpet on the landing—I heard Edgar Selden exclaim, "Come now, Sarah, none of this stupid jealous nonsense on your part! You mustn't think that I am going to be pinned to your apron-strings!"

"This is abominable!" cried my sister, evidently in a towering passion; "and I will stand it no longer. I insist upon knowing where you were all day yesterday, and who that note which came just now, was from?"

"Well then, you sha'n't know either—and so that's all about it," responded Selden, in a tone that even savoured of brutality.

I was about to enter, when I heard a sudden crash as of some china or glass ornament knocked off the table; and half in affright, I was about to retreat precipitately, not choosing to become the witness of such a scene as was evidently going on within that room,—when I heard another sound resembling a blow, and Selden's voice exclaiming in

accents of rage, "You precious vixen, you—I will teach you to smash the things!"

Heavens! he was beating my sister. I rushed into the room, and found them struggling together—she having caught hold of both his wrists, he endeavouring to disengage himself from her grasp—she infuriate, he enraged—she with her long black hair all dishevelled over her bare shoulders, he with his shirt-front hanging in shreds. Oh, what a spectacle to meet my eyes!

"Coward!" I exclaimed, springing forward: and at the same moment, Sarah, leaving him free, threw herself upon the sofa and gave vent to an hysterical outburst of passion—while Mr. Selden, pale and covered with confusion, retreated to the farther end of the room. I quickly closed the door to prevent my sister's cries from reaching the ears of the domestics; and the glimpse which I caught of the fragments of a splendid porcelain vase scattered upon the carpet, confirmed my belief as to one of the circumstances which I had suspected while on the landing.

"Good heavens, Sarah," I said, "compose yourself—tranquillize your feelings—you will alarm the house."

"And what do I care if I do?" she cried, starting up and confronting me as fiercely as if I myself had offended her. "He treats me infamously—I can endure it no longer—he is neglecting me—he goes out and leaves me by myself—he receives letters and will not show them to me—he drives me into a fury—and as if to crown all, he has beaten me! Oh, you coward!" she ejaculated, her fine teeth gleaming and her magnificent eyes flashing fire, as she turned her infuriate countenance towards Edgar Selden.

"It's all very well," he observed, having by this time recovered his habitual supercilious coolness; "but there are two versions to the story—"

"Ah, he will say anything!" cried Sarah: "he is full of deceit and wickedness! Did you not promise to marry me, you wretch? Did you not swear to take me as far as Gretna? and when we were beyond Birmingham, did you not on some pretence turn off into another road—and—and then—you deceived me!"

But stopping short in a paroxysm of unutterable rage, Sarah sank down upon the sofa again, and began shaking herself, wringing her hands, and stamping her feet, just as if she were a spoilt child of two or three years old.

"My dearest sister," I said, "you must calm yourself—you must control your feelings. This is altogether unworthy of you!"

She however burst forth into renewed invectives against Selden, accusing him of infidelity towards her, but without making any definite charge—until at last the violence of her feelings subsiding, she sobbed and wept in what may be termed the lulling of the storm.

"Now, Mary," said Mr. Selden, "since you are here, and since you have heard one version of the story, perhaps you will have the impartiality to listen to the other? And I shall endeavour to speak coolly—and as fairly, too, as possible. I love Sarah dearly, and have shown her as much kindness as man can show—or at all events as my nature can testify. For the first two months or so, it was all well enough—and no one could be happier, more

contented, or more affectionate than she was. But at last the cloven foot of jealousy began to peep out; and if I only took a stroll by myself for half-an-hour, or went to dine with a bachelor-friend, I was received with black looks and sulkainess when I came home. I reasoned with Sarah—and she can't deny it. But she only got worse; and instead of black looks and sulkainess, I received upbraidings and invectives. So I thought that change of scene would probably do her good, and at the same time convince her that I had no other tie (as she seemed to suspect) to prevent me devoting myself wholly and solely to herself. We went to a watering-place, and only came back the day before yesterday. Now, the best part of yesterday I was kept in the City by some money-affairs; and because on coming home to dinner I was assailed with the most violent invectives, I did not choose to humble myself by explaining what had detained me so long. Well, Sarah continued sullen and gloomy up till within the last half-hour—when this note came:—and as Edgar thus spoke, he tossed the letter open upon the table. "You can read it, Mary; and you will see that it is on a purely business matter. But when Sarah passionately and violently insisted upon knowing from whom it came and what its contents were, I did not choose to satisfy her. Then she flew out at me like a tigress: an altercation ensued—and in her rage she snatched up that costly vase and dashed it against the wall. I rushed forward to prevent her: she tore my shirt-front in the way you see it—and I must confess that in my rage I gave her a tolerably hard slap upon her bare shoulder. Now you know the whole truth, Mary; and I leave you to decide between us."

"Mr. Selden," I answered, not looking at the letter which he had thrown down—for I had no doubt he had rightly described it,—“you have detailed a catalogue of grievances against my sister, and it certainly does appear that she has been hasty in her suspicions and injudicious in her conduct. But have you placed her in that position which would inspire her with the noble confidence of a trusting wife? Nor have you thought fit to allude to the accusation she made against you. Ah! sir, those few words she uttered, showing how you had deceived her, contained a whole volume in themselves!”

Throughout Edgar Selden's speech—and also while I was addressing him—Sarah remained perfectly quiet. She had wiped away her tears—her sobs were stifled—the storm of passion was passed—and she was now looking with a sort of sullen and pouting tenderness at the young man, as if a single encouraging word from his lips would make her precipitate herself into his arms. She seemed to know that she had been too hasty, too violent—that she had given way to an unfounded jealousy, and had wronged him: but her pride would not permit her voluntarily to confess her error nor make the first overture towards a reconciliation. On the other hand, Edgar Selden was evidently quite willing to make it up with her: but he also had his pride, and would not volunteer the initiative advances.

"Mr. Selden," I said, going up to him and laying my hand on his arm—and I spoke too in a low serious tone,—“you see that poor Sarah loves you: I conjure you to make her your wife!”

"I wouldn't mind," said my sister, still pouting,

"if he would only tell me where he goes; and if he says that he is sorry for having struck me, I am quite willing to confess that I was wrong to break the vase."

"Well, but will you also confess," demanded Edgar, advancing a pace or two towards her, "that you were wrong to give way to such violence?"

"Yes," replied Sarah; "if you on the other hand will admit that you might have answered more kindly when you came in yesterday to dinner. I am sure I don't want to be bad friends."

"And I am sure I don't either," rejoined Selden; and then he advanced still nearer to my sister, so that it was easy to perceive how all this would end.

"He knows I love him dearly," she murmured, flinging upon him another deprecating look.

"And she knows that I do all I can to make her happy," observed Edgar.

"Well then, why——" and Sarah stopped short.

"Yes, but you——" and Mr. Selden likewise stopped short.

There was a few moments' pause, and then Sarah threw herself into his arms. They embraced and kissed each other most ardently; and I thought it best to leave them together in this mood. I therefore slipped out of the room. It would only have been to open a fresh wound by referring to the deceit whereby Edgar had beguiled my poor sister. I quitted the house precipitately, and with a certain degree of satisfaction in my heart. I saw that Selden really loved her; and I thought that if I wrote him a very strong urgent letter, the arguments of which would be to a certain extent based upon the scene which had just occurred, it would have far more effect than if I had stayed to persist obtrusively in my entreaties for him to do her justice.

As I was passing down Regent Street towards Conduit Street, where I intended to call upon Mrs. Chaplin, I suddenly encountered Mr. Tomlinson and my brother Robert. They were walking arm-in-arm; but instead of the jaunty self-sufficient look of the former, and the rakish recklessness of the other, they had a very serious aspect, and likewise appeared to be engaged in earnest discourse. On perceiving me they stopped suddenly; and at the first glance I noticed that their chains and jewellery had disappeared, and that their apparel did not denote the same comfortable circumstances as when I had seen them at Gretna-Green.

"Ah, Mary!" said my brother: "and what are you doing with yourself?"

"Occasionally are we destined to meet thee, dark-eyed sister of my friend!" said Mr. Tomlinson, but with less of his former pomposity either of look or speech.

"Are you staying in London, Mary?" asked Robert.

"Yes," I replied. "I am in service with a lady near Haekney."

"Service!" echoed my brother in a tone of disgust. "Well, so we met at Gretna—eh?" he continued, with a faint endeavour to laugh. "But, by Jove! that has not turned out so good a business for me and Tomlinson as we expected. The Alderman swears he will never forgive his daughters; and they have not got a penny of their own."

"Then how are you living, Robert?" I asked.

"Living?" he ejaculated. "Well, that's rather difficult to say. How are we living, Tomlinson?"



"With no more facility than you yourself have experienced, can I respond unto that question. One thing however is pretty certain," added the ex-manager, suddenly casting off his theatrical air,— "that if it had not been for our uncle, we could not have lived at all."

"Your uncle?" I ejaculated, gazing upon Robert in bewildered surprise: for I knew not that we had such a relative upon the face of the earth.

"Your sister is verdant—most verdant, friend Robert," said Mr. Tomlinson.

"Oh, bother take it, Mary!" cried my brother; "don't you know who one's uncle is? It's the pawnbroker. There, now—your countenance quite changes! I suppose you think there's a disgrace in putting one's things up the spout?"

"There can be no disgrace in having recourse to those means," I answered, "when necessity compels. I did so for you, Robert, when you were in embarrassment a year ago."

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"In trouble at Clerkenwell—eh?" observed my brother. "By the bye, I was very sorry I didn't stop the other day at Gretna to thank you for what you did on that occasion. But you saw how we were hurried. I dare say you were preciously surprised to find that, after all, we managed to hook the Alderman's daughters, notwithstanding the exposure that you yourself made that night in Finsbury, when we were going to clope with them. Ah! but in hooking them we have hooked ourselves!"

"Not a mag—not a scurrick," ejaculated Tomlinson, "can we by any magical process extract from the hermetically sealed pocket of the gouty old civic functionary."

"But, my eyes, what a vixen his wife is!" ejaculated Robert. "I and Tomlinson," he continued in explanation to me, "went bang to the house in Broad Street about a week back; and though we were assured by the flunkey that Alderman and Mrs. Bull were at Magog Villa at Clapham, we

nevertheless pushed our way into the parlour—and there we found them both comfortably seated together. The Alderman had one leg all wrapped up in flannel and as big as an elephant's; but when we announced ourselves, he snatched up his crutch and was going to knock us down—while Mrs. Bull declared she was seized with such a fit of the spasms that she was quite doubled up. So to undouble herself, she emptied half the contents of what she called her medicine-bottle; and then she looked at us with her vixenish eyes and her red nose flaming, as if she could have sprung at us like a she-cat. Tomlinson began addressing old Bull in that speech which Othello delivered to the senate in apology for running off with Brabantio's daughter. But old Bull cut him short by vowing he would have us both up to Guildhall, try us himself, and make out our commitment to the House of Correction for fourteen days each as — what did he call us, Tomlinson?"

"Rogues and vagabonds," responded the ex-manager.

"Yes—that was it, the precious old rascal!" exclaimed Robert. "I had a deuced great mind to cudgel him soundly with his own crutch; but as we wanted to see if we couldn't come to some understanding about money-matters, I thought it best to be civil. However, although I do really believe the old man would have melted if left to himself, it all ended in nothing. That wife of his, with her spasms and medicine-bottle—she kept putting her tongue in; and the Alderman would not draw his purse-strings."

"And may I ask," said I, "what you propose to do, Robert?"

"You hav'n't got a guinea in your pocket, Mary?" he exclaimed: "for if so, me and Tomlinson have got an opportunity of doing something which we can't very well do without it."

I took out my purse which contained a few pounds—the remnant of Mr. Appleton's last act of bounty towards me, together with the wages I had received at Mrs. Summerly's, and which were most liberal; and producing a couple of sovereigns, I gave them to Robert, observing, "I do indeed hope these will be useful. But what opportunity have you, and to which you alluded?"

"The opportunity of getting a deuced good dinner," rejoined my brother, laughing, "which we hav'n't had for two or three days past. Come, old fellow," he added, turning towards his companion, "let's be off and enjoy ourselves. Bye bye, Mary."

"One moment, Robert!" I exclaimed, shocked at his heartlessness in thus literally duping me out of my money; although I cared not for the gold itself, but was only hurt at the manner in which he obtained it. "Where is your wife? Do you not mean to expend that money with her?"

"Not I, by jingo!" ejaculated Robert. "She must shift for herself. It's quite enough that I condescend to favour her with my company—in short, that I continue to live with her—seeing how I have been humbugged by her father."

"I do not think, Robert, that you have any right to complain of Alderman Bull's conduct, inasmuch as you married his daughter without his consent. But tell me where your wife is living."

"Oh, it's no secret!" he exclaimed; "and if you like to go and see her and give her something, I

dare say she will be very glad. But the lodgings are not very aristocratic—not what I and Tomlinson have enjoyed in our time?"—and then he named the address, which was in Brewer Street, Golden Square. "By the bye," he added, just as he was about to turn away again, "what about Sarah? Weren't you going to tell me something concerning her when we met at Gretna?"

"I was searching for her at the time," was my answer, mournfully delivered.

"Well, and what about her? did you find her? had she run away with somebody? I could almost have sworn that I saw her a couple of months back with a young fellow in a splendid turn-out: but I didn't think it could be her after all."

"It nevertheless was, no doubt," I replied: then drawing my brother a little apart, so that Mr. Tomlinson might not hear what I said, I added, "I hope, Robert, that you will entertain a proper feeling of distress when I tell you that Sarah—"

But I could say no more: my feelings swelled up into my very throat—and the tears started from my eyes.

"Oh, a deuced proper feeling of distress I am likely to entertain!" he cried. "Why, if the girl is well off—for I understand what you mean—what better could she have done? And you, Mary, are a great fool for your pains in continuing in service—such an uncommon handsome girl as you are—"

"Robert," I answered, with the flush of indignation on my cheeks, "you must never again address me in such terms as these; or else shall I be forced, when next we meet, to pass my own brother by without speaking to him. However, no more on that point."

"But where is Sarah living?" demanded Robert, totally indifferent to the reproof I had just given him: "and who is the young fellow that she is with? If he is a right sort of chap, me and Tomlinson will go and make his acquaintance."

"I shall not tell you where Sarah lives," I at once answered.

"Oh, just as you like!" he said in an ill humour:—then turning abruptly away, he rejoined Mr. Tomlinson, who made me a theatrical bow, and they passed up the street together.

I was perfectly satisfied with myself for having refused to give Robert Sarah's address, and for which refusal I had been struck at the moment by many reasons. In the first place, with all his faults, Mr. Selden was a gentleman in taste and manners; and it could not be supposed that he would relish the company of Mr. Tomlinson or my unfortunate brother. In the second place, I feared that Robert, from what he had just said, would rather encourage his sister Sarah in an evil course of life, than seek to reclaim her from it;—and in the third place, I did not choose to stand the chance of setting Robert and his companion to prey vulture-like upon whatsoever funds or resources Edgar might possess. I need scarcely add that this interview with my brother served not to elevate my spirits; and again had I cause to tremble when I asked myself what was to become of him? While thus pondering, I drew towards Golden Square, which was at no great distance; and inquiring for Brewer Street, I found indeed that it was not a very aristocratic quarter. Looking out for the particular number

which Robert had mentioned, I found that it belonged to a house kept by a fishmonger; and a great fat red-faced woman, but with still redder arms, was arranging a few pairs of soles and a sickly-looking cod-fish upon a newspaper spread out on the window-board, so as to make the most of her limited stock-in-trade. I hesitated whether I should now carry into execution my project of visiting my brother's wife. Judging from the appearance of the house, I concluded that the lodging they inhabited must be a humble, if not a mean one; and I did not wish to cause the Alderman's daughter the slightest humiliation. I was even retreating from the vicinage of the shop, when it occurred to me that perhaps the poor young lady might be in want: for it was but too plainly evident that none of the money I had given my brother, would be appropriated to her use—and the idea that she might be suffering from privations, decided me to turn back again. Accosting the fat fish-woman,—who had got an old rusty black bonnet, as large as a kitchen coal-scuttle, falling half off her head, and displaying a dirty white cap with enormous frills,—I said to her, “Do Mr. and Mrs. Price live here?”

“Yes, they does,” she answered; then as several people were passing at the time, she shouted out in a hoarse bassoon-like voice, “Soles, soles—cheap soles! Fresh cod! Buy, buy, buy!”—but as nobody stopped at the time to purchase, she took her eyes off her fish and bestowed a good long stare upon me.

“Is Mrs. Price within?” I asked: “and if so, which is the way to her apartments?”

“The Tomlinsons and the Prices all lives together,” she answered. “The men is out, but the vimen is in. *Ladies* I s’pose they calls themselves: but to my mind them isn’t ladies which can’t pay their way. Fresh soles! live cod! Buy, buy, buy!”

“Which is the way?” I asked, now speaking somewhat impatiently: for the woman was treating me with a cool insolence, as if I were implicated in the pecuniary defalcations of her lodgers.

“Top bell, side door,” she answered. “There it be!”—and she jerked her great red hand over her huge shoulder, upon which there was a little shawl, looking uncommonly like a potato-sack doubled into a triangle.

I now observed that there was a little side-door; but I am certain that it was too narrow for the mistress of the shop to pass her bulky form through that entrance-way. There were three bell-handles, one above another, in the door-post. A little brass plate denoted that the lower one belonged to “*HERR VAN DAUB, Artist*,” while some writing scrawled in black paint showed that the second pertained to “*Mrs. SUDSBY, Laundress*.” The third, or uppermost bell had no brass plate nor caligraphic indication whatsoever. This was the one which I accordingly pulled; and at the expiration of nearly ten minutes, during which the shopwoman continued bassooning forth her live soles and her fresh cod—which, by the way, emitted a most disagreeable odour,—a ragged, dirty-looking girl, about ten years old, opened the door. To her my question was renewed, whether Mrs. Price was at home?

“Don’t know,” she answered; “but think she be. You’d better go up to the third pair and ax for her yourself.”

With these words, and leaving the door wide open, the girl hurried up a narrow dark staircase; and I, closing the door, proceeded in the same direction. The house was filled with nauseous odours, alike from the stale fish and the bad drainage; and it afflicted me—little cause as I had to sympathize with them—that the Alderman's daughters should have been compelled to take refuge in such a place.

On gaining the second floor, I saw the dirty little girl peeping forth from a door which she held ajar; and knowing that to be the washerwoman's lodging, I concluded that it was a little Miss Sudsby who had answered my summons; but if so, it would have done her a world of good to have been mixed up with the linen in her mother's tubs for a quarter of an hour to wash the grime off. On reaching the third floor, I again hesitated whether I should pay the visit I had contemplated. The appearance of the house was wretched in the extreme—dilapidated, dirty, and poverty-stricken: the staircase-windows, looking upon the back, having lost several of their panes, had the spaces filled up with paper or with rags stuffed through. Oh! what a difference between this and the Alderman's house in Broad Street—and no doubt a far greater difference still in respect to Magog Villa at Clapham. I literally had to summon up my courage to knock at the room-door which I had now reached; and during the few instants that elapsed ere the summons was answered, I felt as if I were myself undergoing the humiliation which I was so fearful of inflicting upon others. The door opened—and Mrs. Tomlinson, the Alderman's eldest daughter, made her appearance. She uttered an ejaculation of surprise, and then became red as scarlet.

“Who is it, Liz?” asked, from within the room, the well known voice of Lydia—now my sister-in-law.

“Why, it's Mary,” responded Mrs. Tomlinson, not knowing how to act, and methought more than half-inclined to bang the door in my face.

“Mary who?” was the next inquiry from within.

“Why, Mary Price, to be sure,” replied Mrs. Tomlinson. “Well, I suppose you have come to see us, Mary,” she continued, in a somewhat more civil tone; and she made way for me to enter the room. But what a room! It was no doubt meant for a ready-furnished lodging. A rag of a carpet, soiled, torn, and greasy—an old rickety table—half-a-dozen dilapidated rush-bottomed chairs, nearly black with dirt—and a half-opened cupboard, revealing some miserable articles of crockery—these were the principal features of the place. A door, which stood wide open, afforded a glimpse into an inner room, where there was a wretched tent-bedstead without any curtains. Mrs. Tomlinson and Mrs. Price were dressed in old cotton gowns that looked very much as if they would have been all the better if passed through Mrs. Sudsby's wash-tubs. In short, both the ladies were slatternly, slovenly—with their hair in disorder, their shoes down at heel, holes in their stockings, and having altogether a dirty appearance. The whole scene was one of poverty that seeks not to help itself.

“I hope,” said I, “that I do not intrude. I met Robert and Mr. Tomlinson—they told me where you dwelt—and I considered it my duty,” I added, looking earnestly at Lydia, and speaking significantly, “to pay my respects to you.”

As I thus spoke, I extended my hand to my sister-in-law; and as she took it, the tears ran down her cheeks. Can I flatter myself that she was touched by my demeanour towards her as much as by a sense of bitter humiliation? Let me hope that she was not indifferent to the former feeling. At all events, I pressed her hand warmly, and kissed her upon the cheek. Then I turned towards Mrs. Tomlinson, who, with a kind of cold hauteur—likewise blended with a sense of humiliation—gave me her hand; but it was immediately withdrawn again.

"I do not know," said I, endeavouring to put myself upon as pleasant a footing as possible—at least with my sister-in-law, if not with Mrs. Tomlinson,—“whether you intended to go out to-day: but I should like to pass an hour or two with you. It is a holiday with me.”

“Yes—stay with us,” said Lydia. “I shall be glad if you will:”—and I saw her make a rapid sign to her sister, as much as to bid her unbend towards me.

“I am afraid if you do,” exclaimed Mrs. Tomlinson, with bitterness in her accents, “that you will not be very well entertained:”—and thus speaking, she threw the cupboard completely open, to display its nakedness in respect to food.

“Oh!” I at once said; “you must really let me have my own way, and I will save you the trouble of making any preparations. I shall be back in a few minutes.”

With these words I hurried from the room—sped down stairs—and issued from the house. I paid a rapid succession of visits to the baker’s, the butcher’s, the grocer’s, and the fruiterer’s, where I made somewhat extensive purchases, expending the best part of a couple of pounds, and ordering all the things to be at once sent to the address that I gave. On returning to the house, I stepped into the shop, and interrupted the fish-woman in the midst of the delectable occupation of skinning some eels, by telling her that I wished to have a word with her. Perhaps the idea struck her that my intention was of a nature agreeable to herself; and she assumed a more pleasant look than she had hitherto worn.

“Would you let me know,” I asked, “the little amount in which Mr. Tomlinson and Mr. Price are indebted to you?”

“Three furnished rooms at fourteen shillings a-week, and three weeks a-owing,” replied the woman: “that makes two pound two.”

“The ladies requested me to settle it for them, as I came in with some change,” I said, considering the falsehood to be a very venial one: and I forthwith produced the money—so that now the contents of my purse were reduced to a slender sum.

“Well, that’s business!” said the woman; “and I always knowed that the money was safe and that they was real gentlemen and ladies. I will send up a receipt presently, Miss.”

“That will do:”—and issuing from the shop, I again rang at the third-floor bell. The washer-woman’s daughter answered it once more; and this time she received sixpence for her pains—so that she had the politeness to wait till I entered, and then shut it after me. On ascending to the room which I had ere now quitted, I found that most of the things I had purchased had already arrived.

“This is really too good of you,” said Lydia,

visibly touched by my conduct: and even Mrs. Tomlinson condescended to utter some friendly observation. When the meat came from the butcher’s, I insisted upon preparing the dinner myself; and in short, I did my best, not only to render myself as useful and agreeable as I could, but likewise to spare the two unfortunate ladies as much painful humiliation as possible. I remained with them about a couple of hours, during which time Lydia became most friendly, while Mrs. Tomlinson unbent more and more—although I conjectured full well that it cost her a severe struggle with her pride to do so. They scarcely said a word relative to their husbands, who had not made their appearance when I took my leave. Previous to my departure I told Lydia that I should be most likely unable to visit her again for a month, and begged her to write to me in case she changed her abode—which she promised to do. I afterwards called upon Mrs. Chaplin, with whom I took tea—and then returned by eight o’clock to Sunbeam Villa.

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE INCIDENTS OF ANOTHER HOLIDAY.

THREE months passed: it was now the end of January—and I received another letter from Eustace. This was in response to that which I had written to him from Guernsey: but it was forwarded through the Deal post-office, as I had requested him to continue addressing his letters there, not knowing at the time how long I might remain with Miss Maitland: for mine was penned during the first fortnight I was in her service, and when her domestics were doing all they could to render my place intolerable. Eustace again spoke of his friend Henry Crawford—telling me that this young officer was becoming more and more gloomy, and more prone to sorrowful forebodings. During these three months I had written several letters to Mr. Selden without receiving any answer. I had likewise written to Sarah, and had obtained but one hurried and laconic reply, telling me that she was contented enough with her lot, and begging that I would not interfere with her. I had called in Margaret Street on each occasion of my monthly holidays, but was told that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Selden were at home. I had likewise called each time in Brewer Street, and had passed a few hours with the Alderman’s daughters, whose position I found to be as wretched as when I was first there. On neither of these occasions did I see my brother or his constant companion the ex-manager; nor did the two ladies do more than barely allude to them.

Sybilla Trevanion continued a resident at Sunbeam Villa. She endeavoured in the presence of her aunt to maintain a certain air of cheerfulness; but I do not think that the old lady was completely deceived thereby: indeed Sybilla herself told me that Mrs. Summerly questioned her once or twice as to whether she had anything upon her mind. When alone with me, Miss Trevanion very rarely alluded to the one topic upon which all her thoughts were nevertheless fixed. She still retained the conviction that when tidings should arrive from India at the proper period, they would bring the intelli-

gence of the death of him whom she loved; and she evidently felt the necessity of nerving herself, even thus long beforehand, with all her courage in order to consummate the sacrifice, when the time should come, that was to save her father from ruin.

The reader will observe that very nearly four months had now elapsed since that memorable tenth of October which was so important a date for her; and it may be asked whether during these four months Sybilla's wild music thrilled, and crashed, and complained through the villa, as it had been wont to do for the first few weeks of her visit. She sometimes played—not so often as she did—and her music now was generally of a soft and plaintive character,—as if in the sighing, and moaning, and lamentation of her harp, her own spirit was pouring forth its sense of woe. Nevertheless, as she herself had foretold, she did not weep—she did not give way to anguish; but all the natural power of the mind was displayed in the firmness of her bearing.

It was at the close of January that I took my usual monthly holiday, and my first visit was paid to Margaret Street. The clocks were proclaiming the hour of eleven in the forenoon when I reached the house; and as the servant opened the front door, Sarah was passing through the hall towards the staircase. She could not therefore be denied to me; but turning back, asked me to enter. Her manner was not exactly cold and distant—but it was that of one who endeavours to appear cordial when she would rather not receive the visit that is being paid. She was not looking well; she had become thinner, and her countenance seemed careworn. We ascended together to the drawing-room: Mr. Selden was not there—and I was glad to find myself alone with my sister.

"I am very sorry, Mary," she said, endeavouring to assume a cheerful air, "that I was not at home when you called on the last two occasions. "You must not think that I was purposely denied to you:"—and yet in her manner I read the confirmation of my suspicion that such had really been the case. "Come, sit down," she continued; "and let us chat. Are you still in the same place? and are you comfortable?"

"I am very comfortable, my dear Sarah," I replied; "but should be still happier if I were not compelled to grieve on your account."

"Oh! pray don't begin talking in that way to me," she ejaculated: "and I hope that you won't bore me with any more of your long letters. But don't look so serious, now. You see I am quite gay and happy:"—but as she tried to laugh, the attempt struck me as being sickly and ineffectual to a degree; and then she hummed a tune, although it was now quite evident that her heart was full, and that had she been alone she would have burst into tears.

"Now, Sarah," I said, looking earnestly in her face, "you are *not* happy; and all this gaiety on your part is merely assumed;"—for I saw full plainly that there was a restless glitter in her eyes, and that all her movements had something hysterically vicious in them.

"Why do you speak to me like this?" she cried, almost inclined to put herself into a passion.

"Because, Sarah, it is my duty——"

"Duty! that silly word——"

"Ah! but it expresses something to a sense of which you will sooner or later be recalled. Pray do not interrupt me, Sarah. You are not happy; and you never can be—you never will be, while living in this manner. I conjure you to come away with me. You shall have a pleasant little lodging near Sunbeam Villa; and so soon as I can conveniently leave Mrs. Summerly, I will live with you. I have no fear of earning a livelihood for us both. I will keep a little school—or I will take in needlework——In short, I am not without kind friends, who will render me every assistance."

"What is the use of talking in this way, Mary?" exclaimed Sarah, with a petulance which, when thus displayed, made me wonder that she had suffered to proceed even so far. "I cannot leave him. And yet——"

But she stopped short; and unable to restrain her pent-up feelings any longer, burst into tears. I said all I could to console her. At first she pushed me away with passionate violence, as if I myself had offended her: but gradually she suffered me to caress her: and throwing my arms round her neck, I strained the unhappy girl in a fervid embrace.

"It's no use denying it—no use concealing it, Mary," she said, sobbing as if her heart would break. "He is now treating me cruelly—and he cannot say that it is my fault."

At this moment footsteps were heard ascending the stairs with a sort of leisurely careless walk; and the door opening, Edgar Selden made his appearance.

"Ah, Mary! you here again?" he said, as if perfectly indifferent upon the subject; then without taking any notice of Sarah, he threw himself upon a sofa, observing, "By the bye, you wrote me a lot of letters, Mary; but I had not time to read much of them, and none to answer them. Don't think it rude that I did not; but it's a little out of my way to keep up a long correspondence."

"No," exclaimed Sarah, who had hastily brushed away her tears the moment Edgar's steps were heard: "he has no time for anything except for the parcel of reprobates with whom he associates—and the bad women too, no doubt."

"It's false, Sarah—and you know it," replied Selden, not pointedly, but with supercilious coolness.

"It's true—and you know it!" she ejaculated with hysterical vehemence. "What are you out every night for until two or three in the morning? keeping me sitting up for you——"

"Who asks you to sit up?"—and then Edgar began to hum a tune.

"Who asks me? Why, how can I lie down quietly to go to sleep, when I know that you are raking and in bad company?"—and Sarah stamped her foot with rage.

"My companions are young noblemen and gentlemen, with whom it is fitting that I should associate," was Selden's response, still cool and supercilious.

"How do I know that?" cried Sarah. "I have only your word for it."

"And do you think I shall condescend to give you any proofs?" he demanded, now flinging an angry glance upon her; and the colour mounted to his cheeks.

"But why do you constantly leave me now?" exclaimed Sarah, white with rage; and she quivered from head to foot.

"Because you do all you can to make my home as wretched as possible. I am not sorry that your sister is here to listen to what takes place between us. I have already stood more nonsense from you than any other man out of a thousand would have done; and it has only been for certain considerations—"

"There!" shrieked forth Sarah, literally bounding upon her seat. "You hear what he says, Mary! He tells me plainly that he does not love me any more—that he is tired of me—that it would take but little to make him cast me off. Yes: that is the phrase! Cast me off! cast me off!"—and after this torrent of words, Sarah threw herself upon the floor, kicking and shaking herself, and beating her forehead, as if she were frenzied.

"For heaven's sake desist, my poor sister!" I said, bending down with the endeavour to raise her up.

"Oh! let her be," observed Edgar Selden. "I am accustomed to these fits,—being generally blessed with one every other day, or so:"—and yet as he spoke, I must do him the justice to say that there was a certain uneasiness in his look and excitement in his accents, as if he was really more afflicted by the spectacle than he chose to confess.

"I will tear his eyes out!" shrieked Sarah, starting up to her feet; and she was flying towards Edgar like a tigress, when I caught her round the waist; and though she battled and struggled violently with me, I succeeded in getting her to the sofa, where she lay panting and gasping in breathless exhaustion.

"There, Mary," resumed Mr. Selden, "you have a specimen of the way in which we live. The last time you were here I told you that I did all I could to make your sister happy; and if she had studied to make me happy in return, there never would have been a cross word passing between us. But her temper is dreadful—no human being can stand it—I am literally driven out of the house, and compelled to go and seek amusement any where else. Now, it is rather too bad, when a man really wants to stay at home, and would gladly pass his evenings here, that he should be driven away from his own fireside."

"If I didn't care for you," interjected Sarah, half passionately and half poutingly, "it would be a matter of indifference to me where you went and what you did."

"Well, but if you do care for me," replied Selden, "you adopt a very odd way in showing it."

"Did I not put faith in all your promises?" she cried: "did I not—But, Oh! I see that you love me no longer!" and again a torrent of tears gushed forth.

"Now, what on earth can I do with such a wayward headstrong being?" exclaimed Selden, starting from his seat in considerable agitation. "It would take but little to make me put on my hat and leave the house again."

"Oh! do it—do it!" screamed forth Sarah. "Of course you are the master—you can do as you like—and I must be left here all by myself!"

"I don't want to leave the house," retorted Selden angrily: "but what I do want is to have it

rendered tolerable. For a long time past it has been a perfect pandemonium——"

"Well, there are faults on both sides," observed Sarah, now becoming calmer, and with tenderness again appearing in her looks. "Have I not told you that if you choose to have your friends here, instead of going out to seek them, I will do my best to make them comfortable?"

"Yes: and one evening when I did have a parcel of them to supper here," interrupted Selden, "what a beautiful scene we had! You flew out in a rage at something, and stormed in the presence of them all."

"Because you talked entirely to them, and never said a word to me," rejoined Sarah: "or if you did, it was so cool and distant that I could not endure it."

"Then, if you thought so," answered Edgar, "you might have waited till they had gone before you put yourself into a rage."

"Oh! but one speaks what one thinks at the time," cried Sarah, pouting. "You are very unkind towards me, Edgar—for I am sure that I do love you very much!"—and now she wept again, not passionately, but with a more subdued and natural grief.

"If it wasn't for that consideration," rejoined Selden, speaking in a milder and more yielding tone than before, "I should not have put up with all I have done."

"I am sure I would do my best," observed Sarah, now looking up at him with her tearful eyes, "to make your home comfortable: but if you think that I cannot, I don't want to make it unhappy—and instead of your going out, it is for me to leave it."

"Now, Sarah," remarked Edgar Selden, "you are speaking in a way that I do not wish to hear."

"Oh, anything to render you happy and comfortable!" she cried, but evidently knowing very well that she would not be called upon to make the proposed sacrifice.

"Render the home happy and comfortable, and that is all I require."

"But I suppose," she rejoined, still poutingly and deprecatingly, "that you have lost all confidence in me?"

"No—far from it, Sarah. But——"

"Well, but—Ah, I see that you have!"

"Now, don't be foolish, when I tell you I have not;"—and still he kept advancing closer towards her.

"Oh, Edgar! I am afraid I have been very harsh, and cruel, and unkind!" exclaimed Sarah; "and you can't forgive me—I know you can't. If you would only kiss me——"

"Well, I will—and let there be an end of it."

She precipitated herself into his arms; and thus was the quarrel made up. I did not hurry away on the present occasion, but remained awhile in the hope of having an opportunity to speak alone with Mr. Selden. This was furnished by the arrival of some milliner or dress-maker to see my sister and fit on a new dress. She quitted the room; and so soon as the door had closed behind her, I approached Mr. Selden, saying, "You must not think me indelicately obtrusive if I recall to your mind the *one* subject which I consider to be of such vital importance."

"No, Mary," he responded, very seriously, and without the slightest tinge of his wonted flippancy or superciliousness; "we cannot discuss that matter. It is already settled in my mind. Listen—and do not interrupt me. At first I do not hesitate to confess that I regarded this affair with your sister as one of those passing connexions which young men may form; but during the first month we were together, I really learnt to love her with an affection that might have been made permanent. In that case it is probable—indeed it is almost certain—But however, no matter—her temper is intolerable. These quarrellings and reconciliations are now the history of the life I lead. They must have an end sooner or later: but depend upon it that the catastrophe will not be provoked by me. The day of separation will however come; and you, with your own good sense, know that it must. Yet do not think I shall leave your sister in poverty. No—I will not do it. I am not altogether the bad fellow that perhaps you take me to be. And now, Mary, we will drop the subject, if you please."

These last words were uttered in a peremptory manner—but not with rudeness. I scarcely knew how to act or what to say. There had been much truth—alas! far too much, in Mr. Selden's observations. Sarah's temper was alike ungovernable on her part and intolerable on his; and the painful conviction was established in my soul that what he had termed "the catastrophe" must inevitably arrive. While I was yet deliberating whether to persevere in arguing the subject with him, she returned to the room; and embracing him fondly, thanked him for the splendid new dress he had ordered her. Then she was as lavish in her caresses and endearments as she had so recently been in her passionate vituperations; and in all these extremes of feeling I knew there could be no solid elements of a real and uniform happiness. I took my leave, declining Mr. Selden's invitation to remain and pass the day; and it was with profoundly mournful feelings that I left the house. I was bending my steps towards Brewer Street, when in one of the narrow thoroughfares leading thither, I encountered my brother and Mr. Tomlinson. They both looked somewhat better in their apparel than when I had last seen them; and the instant they beheld me, they exchanged rapid looks of intelligence.

"Well, Mary," said Robert, "I have got some good news for you——"

"I shall be glad," I answered, "to hear anything favourable in respect to yourself."

"Oh, yes! it is favourable for both me and Tomlinson," cried Robert. "What do you think? The old man has come down at last with the ready."

"Do you mean Mr. Bull?" I inquired.

"To be sure! Who else could I mean? Look, he has just sent us a cheque on his banker for fifty pounds:"—and as my brother spoke, he drew forth a slip of paper from his waistcoat-pocket.

"It was the fruit of a magnificently written appeal, emanating from mine own hand," said Mr. Tomlinson. "We have conquered, O dark-eyed sister of my friend! Yes—we have taken the Bull by the horns, and he is vanquished."

This was intended as a joke, at which my brother laughed heartily.

"Here's the cheque, you see, Mary," he observed, opening the paper and displaying a printed draft filled up for fifty pounds, and bearing the Alderman's name. "It's on his banker in Lombard Street; and the deuce of it is that me and Tomlinson have got a very particular appointment to keep presently, down in Chelsea; so that we can't possibly go ourselves and get the cheque cashed. Have you got any time on your hands, Mary?"

"Yes," I replied. "What do you want me to do?"

"To go to Lombard Street for us, and get this money. You can then pay yourself what you were good enough to advance me and Tomlinson when we met you in Regent Street three months ago."

"I will, Robert," was my answer: and I took the cheque from his hands. "Where am I to meet you again?"

"Oh! we've left that place in Brewer Street yesterday, and Lydia meant to write and tell you of it. The women are gone looking for other lodgings; and so you won't be able to see them to-day. You can meet me and Tomlinson—say in about two hours—on Waterloo Bridge. We shall be there. So now you can cut off, Mary, into the City."

Mr. Tomlinson and my brother thereupon left me; and at once taking a hackney-coach from the nearest stand, I ordered the driver to take me to Mr. Bull's house in Broad Street. The fact is that the darkest suspicions and misgivings had arisen in my mind. The very instant I saw the cheque, the terrible idea flashed to my imagination that all was not right. Those looks of intelligence which passed so rapidly between Tomlinson and my brother, had first excited my suspicions; and these were confirmed by the circumstance of being asked to get the cheque cashed. I knew Robert well enough, and Mr. Tomlinson likewise, to be fully aware that they themselves would have lost not a moment in obtaining possession of the money, if it were a genuine draught. But, good heavens! did my own brother seek to make me the agent and instrument of a crime? was he shifting upon my head the awful risk which he himself had not the courage to encounter? I wept scalding tears in the coach as it bore me along towards Broad Street; and again and again, as I had often done before, did I ask myself what was to become of that unhappy young man?

When the hackney-coach stopped at the Alderman's house, I was struck by observing that the blinds were all drawn down, and that the dwelling bore the unmistakable evidence of Death being a visitor within. I hesitated therefore to alight from the vehicle: but at the moment a female-servant, who was there at the time when I was in Mrs. Bull's service, came forth. Immediately recognizing me, she came up to the hackney-coach and shook me by the hand. I glanced significantly towards the windows of the dwelling.

"It's missus that's gone," she answered, understanding what I meant. "She died four days ago, and the funeral takes place the day after to-morrow."

"And what did she die of?" I inquired, somewhat shocked at the announcement. "Was her illness long?"

"It's my opinion that it had been as long as sho

was in the habit of taking that medicine; and there's no doubt it's the medicine-bottle that killed her. But what do you think? The Alderman has got his daughters home again!"

"His married daughters?" I exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes—Mrs. Tomliuson and Mrs. Price, as they call themselves—And, by the bye, is it true, Mary, that Lydia is your sister-in-law?"

"It is true," I answered: then after a brief pause, I asked, "Would it be indiscreet, think you, if I requested to see Lydia for a few minutes?"

"Not a bit of it," was the immediate reply. "If it was her own mother that's dead, it would perhaps be different. I was just going out to do a little shopping; but come along with me, and you shall see young missus."

I accordingly alighted from the hackney-coach, and followed the servant into the house. She conducted me to the little back parlour, where I remained alone for a few minutes, at the expiration of which both Elizabeth and Lydia made their appearance. They were dressed in deep mourning, and looked very different from what they were when I had seen them in Brewer Street. It was with as much cordiality as her nature could display, that Lydia welcomed me: but the elder sister was cold and distant, and did not even offer me her hand.

"You have heard, I suppose, of mother-in-law's death?" said Lydia: "but did you expect to find us here? No, I am sure you did not. It happened so sudden, and I meant to write in a day or two and tell you of it." You see, the moment mother-in-law went—"

"She died quite tipsy," interjected Elizabeth, in an unfeeling manner.

"The moment mother-in-law went," repeated Lydia, "father sent to tell us that if we liked to come home again, he would receive us; but that he never would acknowledge those villains—I beg your pardon, Mary, for speaking like this of your brother, but I can't help it."

I looked grieved, but could say nothing in the shape of remonstrance: for I knew full well that these young women, however foolish they might have been, had too much reason to think and speak bitterly of those on whom they had thrown themselves away.

"I can only assure you," continued Lydia, "that we were much too happy to be relieved from the dreadful state in which we were, not to accept our father's proposal. He sent a cheque for ten pounds to enable us to return in a decent manner to the house—"

"A cheque for ten pounds?" I said. "Pray do not think me impertinent—for I will presently explain the real object of my visit here to-day. What became of that cheque?"

"Why," ejaculated Mrs. Tomlinson, "at the time the letter arrived containing it, that brute whose name I unfortunately bear, was in the room; and he snatched it out of my hands."

"And was it cashed?" I inquired hastily.

"No doubt of it," replied Lydia, again becoming spokeswoman: "for Mr. Tomlinson and Robert set off with it at once. We did not wait for their return: we knew we should have none of the money—so we made our appearance as decent as we could, and came home. Thank God, we are here!"

"Do you think," I asked, producing the cheque which I had about me, "that this was the draught, and that it has been altered from ten to fifty pounds?"

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of both the ladies; and Elizabeth exclaimed, "A forgery!—the villains! I will call the Alderman!"—and she was rushing to the door when Lydia held her back, saying, "For God's sake, Liz, do nothing of the sort. Consider the exposure! We ourselves should share in the disgrace by being connected with such desperate villains."

"Well then, what's to be done?" asked Mrs. Tomlinson sullenly.

"Alas!" I said, "I had my misgivings upon the subject;"—and I then hastily explained under what circumstances the cheque had fallen into my hands.

"I understand it all!" exclaimed Mrs. Tomlinson. "It struck me at the time, during the few moments I held the draught in my hand, that it was of unusual thickness, as if of doubled paper. Depend upon it, while tearing out the slip from the cheque-book, the Alderman tore out a blank at the same time with it; and it is this blank which the villains have filled up."

That did indeed appear to be the most probable solution of the mystery: but still I begged Lydia to examine the signature well, so as to decide whether it was Mr. Bull's writing or not. She declared in the negative; and as she spoke positively, I at once tore the cheque in halves and threw the fragments into the fire.

"Yes—that is the best way to settle the business," said Lydia. "Ah! you don't know, Mary, all that we have been made to suffer for our egregious folly!"

"There's no use in dwelling upon it," exclaimed her sister petulantly. "For my part, I would rather leave off thinking of the past altogether."

"Yes," continued Lydia, not heeding her sister's observation, "we have been sorely punished. But the plausibility of those men was enough to deceive Lucifer himself. You do not know how it happened, Mary? Ah, I dare say you think that after the exposure which took place when they represented themselves to be Captain Wimbledon and Mr. Constantine Cavendish, that we should never have had anything more to do with such men? But after a time we met them again; and they made such vows and protestations of love—explained away their past conduct with so much plausibility—"

"Come, there's enough of it," interrupted Elizabeth. "I am ready to go mad when I think of the fool I have been. The idea that those men had suddenly inherited fortunes, and that they could keep us in good style! It was really too preposterous!"

"And yet you, Elizabeth," interjected Lydia, "were so positive in believing them, even when I had my misgivings—"

"Oh, yes—that's right—try to throw it all upon me!" ejaculated the elder sister. "It's just like you, Lydia."

"Well, we were two fools together," observed the younger lady; "and we have suffered for it. I dare say enough has been already said, Mary, to make you understand how it all came about; and of course you can be at no loss to comprehend what



the hope of those men must have been. They thought that the Alderman would forgive us, and allow us handsome incomes: but they have been deceived—bitterly deceived; and we have been made to suffer terribly. But you will take some refreshments? We bear no ill-will towards you. On the contrary, I at least—and I am sure my sister must also recollect with gratitude——”

“To be sure!” interrupted Elizabeth—but I noticed that it was with a certain toss of the head; “and if Mary will tell us how much she thinks we owe her, we will pay her back again. I will go and tell father she is here, and that I want some money for the purpose.”

“No, ma’am,” I said, coldly and proudly; “I did not come hither for any such purpose. The object of my visit is accomplished, and I will take my departure.”

“But you must have some refreshments, Mary,”

continued Lydia, evidently pained by her sister’s conduct towards me.

“I would rather not—but I thank you all the same. And now permit me to take my leave.”

I merely bowed to Mrs. Tomlinson, but shook hands with Lydia—and then issued forth from the house of death. Re-entering the hackney-coach, I ordered the driver to proceed to Waterloo Bridge: and during the ride thither, I sat plunged in the saddest reflections: for I had now another proof of the utter villany of which my brother was capable. That he could have brought himself to commit a forgery, was sufficiently shocking: but that he could be so base and so thoroughly heartless as to seek to implicate me in the transaction—to make me the instrument of working out the crime—was something overpowering and annihilating. I did not weep: the affliction I experienced was too profound to find itself a vent in tears. I was in the stupor

of despair. Hideous images passed through my mind. I beheld my brother wearing the felon's chain—transported to the penal settlements—nay, even ascending the steps of the gallows. Oh, it was horrible—most horrible! I endeavoured to shut out these frightful visions from my mental view; but I could not. They persisted in haunting me; and it was in this deplorable frame of mind, that I felt the vehicle suddenly stop. It had reached Waterloo Bridge. I had taken no note of its progress: I had not even marked through which particular streets it brought me,—so absorbed were all my senses in that despair which I experienced on account of my brother. Alighting from the hackney-coach, I paid the driver his demand, and then entered upon the bridge. Three or four persons were passing over: but I could not discern either Mr. Tomlinson or Robert. I proceeded to the farther extremity of the bridge—and then retraced my way. Presently I beheld Mr. Tomlinson advancing from the Surrey side—very slowly—looking about him in a cautious manner—and every now and then stopping short. I glanced in the other direction, and perceived Robert approaching from the Strand side, and exhibiting the same caution as that shown by the ex-manager. Ah! they feared lest the forgery should have been detected at the banker's, and that the officers of justice were on the spot. Good heavens, that a brother of mine should be reduced to such an ignominious necessity as this—prowl, lurking, sneaking—coming stealthily,—in dread of the myrmidons of the law! I could have sobbed—I could have wept *then*: my affliction sought for a vent: it was no longer the stupor of despair—it was the poignancy of anguish. But I conquered my emotions: for I resolved to try once more—and perhaps for the last time—what my prayers, my remonstrances, my entreaties might do in separating Robert from that man who appeared to be his evil genius, and in leading him into a better course of life.

Tomlinson approached me on the one hand—Robert on the other; and when they perceived I was alone, and that no suspicious characters were lurking near, they quickened their pace and simultaneously reached the spot where I was standing. But they evidently saw by my countenance that something was wrong: for they exchanged rapid and significant looks, and then glanced with renewed anxiety around.

"You have nothing to fear, Robert," I said, not taking the slightest notice of Mr. Tomlinson: "for though I know all, yet your personal safety is not endangered."

"Then that business is all dickey!" ejaculated my brother in a tone of vexation. "Come, Mary—out with it! What has happened? And let us have as few reproaches as possible."

"Robert," I said, "I must speak to you alone. Never again will I address a word to your companion: nor, if I can prevent it, shall he ever address another syllable to me."

"Thy dark-eyed sister, friend Robert, is angered, even as the ireful Juno," exclaimed Mr. Tomlinson, extending his arm in a theatrical manner.

"Come with me, Robert," I said, moving away from the spot.

"Well, if you wish it, let it be so," he observed sullenly: and I saw that he made a sign to the ex-

manager to stay where he was. For a few minutes we walked together in silence, until the extremity of the bridge in the direction of the Strand was nearly reached; and then he exclaimed impatiently, "Well, how much farther are we going?"

"We will converse here," I said, stopping short. "Robert, how could you perpetrate such a crime?"

"How did you find it out?" he demanded, putting a bold face upon the matter. "Did you go to the banker's?"

"No—I did not. I suspected from the very first moment that there was something wrong concerning the cheque. I went straight to Broad Street—"

"The deuce you did!" he exclaimed savagely: "then you have blown the thing there—and I suppose the Alderman is going to prosecute us? Well, Mary, if I am transported, it will be through you."

"Never, Robert—never!" I cried, with passionate vehemence. "No, no—I would do anything to save you! The cheque is burnt—the Alderman knows nothing of it—Lydia and Mrs. Tomlinson will not mention the circumstance to their father. And now, I implore and beseech that you will leave this man who is leading you into the depths of crime. Listen to me, Robert: do not interrupt me. If you will come away with me at once, and promise to reform your life, I will pay for your lodgings—I will assist you to the utmost of my power—and you must endeavour to support yourself honourably by work—"

"Well, Mary, you do speak so pretty," he interrupted me, "that I rather think I shall follow your advice. Just give me a sovereign or two now, to settle two or three little things; and to-morrow I will meet you wherever you like."

"No, Robert—not one single shilling will I give you, unless you come away with me."

"But I can't leave Tomlinson so sudden as all this. It wouldn't be fair. We have been together several years now—"

"I know you have, Robert: and how have you profited by this connexion?"

"Why, take it all in all, I have led a jolly kind of life—with a few ups and downs, to be sure."

"And all these," I exclaimed, "are hurrying you on to ruin. Consider, Robert, how worse than unprofitably has your time been spent! what sad things have you done! With pain and grief do I look back upon the last few years of your life—"

"Well," he ejaculated, with a ferocious recklessness in his tone and manner, "out with it all! Tell me that I was the companion of the Bulldog and Sawbridge at Ashford—"

"The monsters," I exclaimed, "who more than once sought to murder me—and who are branded murderers, with a reward offered for their apprehension!"

"Well, but they were not all that when I first knew them," observed Robert sulkily.

"But were they not robbers?" I asked: "and did they not initiate you in the ways of wickedness? Were you not their companion when Twisden Lodge was broken into?"

"Well, Mary, there's enough of all this. Give me a sovereign, like a good girl—and I will join you where you like to-morrow."

"I repeat, Robert, that I will not give you a

shilling if you return to that man. Come with me. We will hasten into the neighbourhood of Hackney—and there you shall take a lodging. My mistress is an excellent lady—I will frankly tell her everything concerning you: but you must enable me to add that you are penitent, and that you intend to reform. Through her you may perhaps obtain employment—Or it would be better perhaps,” I continued in a musing tone, “that I should address myself for this purpose to Mr. Appleton—”

“Your plan is all very fine, Mary,” interrupted Robert; “but I don’t mean to leave Tomlinson. It wouldn’t be handsome. Besides, he and I can work very well together.”

“Robert, I beseech you to pause and reflect!” I exclaimed, with anguish in my tones; and I caught him by the arm. “Unhappy young man! what will become of you? You cannot expect to lead this life for ever, and to tempt justice with impunity. There must be an end of it. Robert,” I added, solemnly, “do you wish to plunge headlong into the vortex of ruin—to dare the felon’s fate—perhaps to toil in chains in the penal settlements—perhaps—But, O heaven, I dare not reflect on it! Robert, dear Robert, will you come with me? Will you leave that man?”

“No!” he ejaculated fiercely; and breaking away from me, hurried back towards the middle of the bridge.

I did not follow—I was overcome by anguish:—and leaning against the parapet for support, I sobbed and wept bitterly. At length I heard footsteps approaching: some persons were advancing over the bridge; and hastily wiping my eyes, I dragged myself away towards the Strand. It was now dusk: the street-lamps were lighted—the gas was flaming in the shops. It had been my original intention to pay my usual visit to Mrs. Chaplin: but I felt so thoroughly unhappy, that I resolved to get back home as soon as possible. I was proceeding along the Strand, when an elderly man, dressed in deep mourning, and whose countenance was familiar to me—though I could not immediately recollect who he was—suddenly accosted me, saying in a respectful tone, “If I mistake not, you are Miss Price?”

I responded in the affirmative; and then the identity of this individual flashed to my recollection. He was Lord Wilberton’s steward—the same who, as the reader will recollect, had called upon me when I was in Alderman Bull’s service, and had taken me to his master’s mansion in Piccadilly.

“You remember who I am,” he said perceiving that I had just recognized him. “Are you living in London?”

“I am in service with a lady who resides near Hackney,” I replied: “and I was this moment looking out for a conveyance to take me thither.”

“But you do not seem happy?” he said, gazing very hard in my face.

“I have a brother,” was my response, “whose conduct has given me much pain. I have just parted from him under circumstances which have left a very disagreeable impression upon my mind.”

“I can sincerely sympathize with you,” responded the steward, who was a good kind of man in his way. “But it is most extraordinary that I should thus have fallen in with you: for your name has

been frequently mentioned in Piccadilly within the last six weeks.”

“Indeed!” I exclaimed, astonished at this announcement—and somewhat alarmed too.

“Yes. But have you an hour or two to spare?”—for when I bethink me, it were perhaps as well that you should accompany me to Wilberton House.”

“I have a day’s holiday,” was my response, “and need not return home till eight or nine o’clock. But I have too painful a recollection of my last visit to Wilberton House to be desirous of renewing it.”

“I know it—I know it,” exclaimed the steward. “But you must consent to come with me now. You need apprehend no scene of violence with her ladyship: she is too deeply plunged in grief—”

“Grief?” I ejaculated: and a sickening sensation now came over me—for I dreaded lest some accident had occurred to my well-beloved Eustace.

“Yes. Is it possible you have not heard the tidings of his lordship’s death?”

“Ah!”—and in one sense I experienced infinite relief. “No: I was unacquainted with the circumstance. When did it happen?”

But instead of giving a direct answer to my question, the steward said, “You will not now refuse to accompany me: or it is on a business which concerns yourself.”

I signified my assent, wondering what the solution of the mystery would be, and experiencing the acutest suspense. The steward at once summoned a hackney-coach: we entered it together—and he gave the driver instructions whither to proceed.

“His lordship,” he said, as we proceeded in the vehicle towards Piccadilly, “died very suddenly six weeks ago. His illness lasted but four-and-twenty hours, during which interval he retained full possession of his senses. He left behind him a certain instruction in his will, which perhaps it would be as well to make you acquainted with. Indeed, I know that such is her ladyship’s wish: but she has not as yet had either time or spirits to make inquiries after you. On several occasions, however, she has observed to me that something should be done in order to discover where you were; and then other matters intervened to occupy our attention. Had I not thus fortunately met you just now, I should in a few days have written a letter to you at Ashford, with the hope that it would find you there—as I know that is your native place.”

“But that instruction to which you have alluded?” I said: for my suspense was most painful, although I more than half-suspected that it was perhaps a solemn interdiction of a dying father to his son against conducting me to the altar.

“You must curb your impatience, Miss Price,” answered the steward, “until you reach Wilberton House. We shall soon be there. You need not fear to encounter her ladyship. Perhaps indeed there may be no longer any necessity—”

And then he suddenly stopped short. It struck me that he meant to inquire whether I was still engaged to the Hon. Captain Eustace Quentin: but he did not finish his sentence—and I did not think it proper to make any remark.

“You have seen the present lord, I believe,” he said, again breaking silence after a short pause. “Yes—I remember that you have:”—and then

he sighed, as if he thought to himself that there was a great difference between his present master and his late one.

He said no more; and in a few minutes the hackney-coach stopped in front of Wilberton House. A hatching, emblazoned with the arms of the noble family, appeared upon the facade of the palatial structure, indicative of the recent visit of Death to that mansion. We alighted; and he conducted me into the house. Showing me to a handsomely furnished parlour, he requested me to wait a few minutes, while he notified my presence to her ladyship. During his temporary absence from the room I endured a suspense the poignancy of which was most acute. What could the instruction be to which he had alluded? Was it one which Eustace Quentin would not dare disobey? or one which I, from a sense of duty, could never suffer him to violate? Was it, in short, a death-blow to all my hopes of happiness? Oh! if this were to prove the case, how blank—how dreary—how forlorn would my prospects become on this side of the grave! What hope would there be left? what would the world have worth living for? Not for a single instant did I mistrust the devoted love of Eustace: not for an instant did I suspect that he would voluntarily prove faithless to his pledges and protestations. I knew him too well for that! But I feared lest circumstances were about to transpire which would render it an incumbent duty for him to sacrifice himself to the dying mandate of his sire: or for me to sacrifice my own hopes in order to rescue Eustace from the effects of a posthumous curse.

In the midst of my harrowing reflections, the door opened and the steward re-appeared. I was conducted up-stairs into that very same back drawing-room where I had seen Lord and Lady Wilberton, and their son—then the Hon. Mr. Quentin—two years back. Her ladyship was seated at the table, with a writing-desk and a number of papers before her. The reader will recollect she has been already described as a stately-looking woman—not very stout, but of a fine *embonpoint*. She was now a little past her fifty-second year—and was of course dressed in deep mourning. She seemed very grave and thoughtful; and it was only with a slight inclination of the head that she acknowledged my presence. When I remembered how I had beheld her turn pale with rage—tremble from head to foot—bend her fierce glances upon me—and denounce against me a withering curse if I dared espouse her son—I felt exceedingly uncomfortable at thus finding myself again with her. But still the thought occurred that as her husband had only been so recently snatched away from her, she would not now suffer herself to be hurried into any intemperate display of feeling. Besides, the steward had so positively guaranteed me against any apprehension of this kind, that as I recollected what he had said, my fears vanished. But still I endured the most torturing suspense as to the object for which I had been brought thither.

The steward retired—and I was now alone with her ladyship. She pointed to a chair, and gazed fixedly upon me for nearly a minute. Then she said in a low voice, “I wish to ask you one question, Mary Price—upon the answer to which will depend the alternatives of prolonging this interview

somewhat, or of putting an end to it at once. I believe you pride yourself upon being a truth-speaking young woman; and therefore you will answer this question in the same spirit.” She paused for a few moments—and then said, “Do you still maintain a correspondence with my son Captain Quentin?”

For several instances I felt so bewildered, I knew not how to answer. Of course I did not think of uttering a falsehood: but should I confess the truth? or should I simply decline to be questioned upon the point at all? It struck me that if I adopted the latter alternative, it would be equivalent to giving an affirmative reply; and therefore I at length said, “Lady Wilberton, I do still correspond with your son.”

She bit her lip—and methought that she even darted a spiteful glance at me: but quickly recovering her self-possession, she took up one of the papers which lay before her—and opening it, said, “This is a copy of his deceased lordship’s will. I deem it advisable that you should be made acquainted with a particular passage. Read where I now draw a line upon the margin:”—and thus speaking, she made a mark with the pen, and handed the paper to me.

My fingers trembled so I could scarcely take it: my heart was beating so loud that I am convinced she must have heard its palpitations. For a moment I felt a dizziness seize upon my brain, and a dimness obscure my vision. Was it the *fiat* of my destiny that I was about to peruse? Exercising an almost preterhuman effort over my feelings, and passing my hand across my eyes to dispel the cloud which seemed to have gathered there, I fixed my looks on the particular paragraph which the ink-mark pointed out. As nearly as I can recollect, it ran in this wise:—

“And with regard to my younger son Eustace Quentin, my intentions and wishes may be thus specified. Whereas my revered brother, General Sir Thomas Wilberton, many years deceased, bequeathed the sum of sixty thousand pounds to my said son Eustace Quentin, held under certain trusts, to be paid to him on the day of his marriage, but only on condition that such marriage should take place with the full consent of his parents,—I do enjoin, will, and instruct, that should my said son Eustace Quentin have already contracted any marriage, with one not possessing a fortune of at least *thirty thousand pounds*, and such marriage being against my consent and that of my beloved wife his mother, the *sixty thousand pounds* conditionally bequeathed by the late General Sir Thomas Wilberton, shall devolve to my elder son Ferdinand Quentin, as my heir. But provided the aforesaid Eustace Quentin, my younger son, shall not as yet have contracted any marriage, I do enjoin my beloved wife, as my executrix, not to consent to any marriage which our said son Eustace Quentin shall propose to solemnize, unless his intended wife be possessed of a fortune in her own right of at least *thirty thousand pounds*. And furthermore, if my said younger son Eustace Quentin shall propose to contract a marriage with a lady possessing the sum of at least *thirty thousand pounds*, then do I enjoin my beloved wife to yield her assent to the same, and to take such measures that the aforesaid sum of *sixty thousand pounds* be made over to our said son Eustace Quentin. Moreover, now that the hand of death is upon me—that I feel mine end approaching—and that I am deeply embued with the solemnity of the circumstances in which I dictate these, my last instructions—I do, as a fond and loving father, earnestly beseech and implore, as well as positively command and enjoin, Eustace Quentin, my younger son aforesaid, to consider well that if he should contract a marriage with

any female who possesses not a fortune rendering her worthy of such an alliance, he will be violating the last dying wishes of his father, and will be guilty of an act of flagrant disobedience, as well as in defiance of the memory of his sire."

Such was the clause which I perused: such were the dying mandates which, though my name was not mentioned, were but too plainly intended to act as an insuperable barrier to my hopes of becoming the wife of the well-beloved Eustace Quentin. He was to marry no one who could not bring with her a fortune of at least thirty thousand pounds. Oh! poor servant-maid that I was—how could I ever aspire to the possession of such a fortune? whence was I to obtain a hundredth part of it? And yet there was this one consolation—that no positive interdiction against my special name was recorded in the deceased nobleman's will. Consolation! how foolish!—what consolation could there be in the omission of a name, when the proviso in respect to the fortune was an insurmountable barrier? Ah, it would be the vainest and silliest infatuation to derive any solace from an omission of this nature, when the entire wording of the clause appeared to constitute a wall of brass against every hope!

Such were the varied reflections which swept through my mind, swift as a hurricane, when I had terminated the perusal of that paragraph in the late Lord Wilberton's testamentary instructions. I cannot describe my sensations: they were composed of a physical stupor and of a mental wildness. In one sense I was paralysed: in another sense I was excruciated. I glanced mechanically towards Lady Wilberton, and observed that her eyes were fixed keenly and penetratingly upon me: but they were instantaneously withdrawn as I bent my looks upon her;—and then she said coldly, "I will not detain you any longer, Mary Price."

I rose from the chair; and for a moment it appeared as if I should sink down helplessly upon the floor: but suddenly exercising a strong effort of command over myself, I bowed respectfully and gained the door. The next moment I stood on the landing outside, where the steward was waiting. He looked hard at me for a moment, and methought with even an expression of sympathy upon his countenance; but just at that instant a door opened on the opposite side of the landing, and an individual, whom I immediately recognized to be the present Lord Wilberton, came forth. He was now twenty-six years of age; and being dressed in deep mourning, looked paler and more sickly than when I had previously seen him. He stared at me for a few moments in an impudent manner; and then appearing to recognize me, exclaimed in his weak voice, "Ah! Mary Price, 'pon my soul!"

I was hastening to the stairs, when he cried out, "Stop a bit! Come here, you young scullery-maid!"

But I heeded him not; and quickening my pace, sped down the staircase, closely followed by the steward. I took a hurried leave of him in the hall—for I was cruelly agitated; and returning to the hackney-coach, made the best of my way back to Sunbeam Villa. During the long ride thither, I reflected painfully—Oh! so painfully, upon the instructions in the deceased nobleman's will: but my mind was made up how to act.

As I entered the villa, I heard the sounds of the

piano pouring their golden flood of harmony through the dwelling; and I knew that it was Sybilla playing. The liquid tones appeared to be dripping from her fingers in tearful strains, and not leaping up from the keys as they were wont to do from her quick electric touch. I paused on the stairs to listen: there seemed to be audible heart-beatings in that music,—the softest and the most melancholy human feelings breathing forth in the tide of harmony. My soul was profoundly touched—I burst into tears—and hurrying up to my own chamber, sat down and wept plentifully.

CHAPTER CXX.

ANOTHER VISIT TO MARGARET STREET.

ON the following day I penned a letter to Eustace Quentin, which I consider requisite to lay before the reader. It ran as follows:—

"Sunbeam Villa, Cambridge Heath Gate, London.
"January 23th, 1832.

"Dearest Eustace,
"I know not whether this letter will find you at Madras, or whether in consequence of your father's decease you will have left ere its arrival. I know not indeed whether you have been summoned back to England at all—or whether, without such summons, you will deem it your duty to return on receipt of the sad intelligence of his lordship's demise. But if you should have left Madras, this letter will doubtless be forwarded back to England after you; and though perhaps in the meantime we shall meet, yet whenever it does reach your hands it will serve as an additional proof of the unselfish and self-sacrificing nature of that love which I bear you. The deceased Lord Wilberton has left in his will an instruction that clearly points to that engagement which subsists between us. Yesterday I was led by accident to Wilberton House; and her ladyship, your mother, showed me that paragraph. If you marry me, Eustace, you lose all your fortune. *That*, I am well aware, will prove but a trivial consideration in your mind; and I know that it would not for a single moment deter you from conducting me to the altar. But this is not all. The dying wishes of your father are too positively expressed for you to violate them. He could only have had your worldly interests at heart; and constituted as society is, it is impossible to blame his lordship for the solicitude he exhibited in respect to his son's welfare. The wife whom he would have you choose, must be possessed of a pecuniary qualification to an amount which I have no earthly chance of obtaining. I cannot suffer myself to become the means of rendering you disobedient to the last dying injunctions of Lord Wilberton: for although I am aware that your noble and generous heart would render one only consideration paramount—namely, your plight of love to me—yet I feel that a marriage so inauspiciously contracted, would be invested with a gloom which you could not help experiencing.

"Therefore, dear Eustace, the moment has arrived when a resolute and determined step must be taken. I absolve you from your vows—I renounce the engagement in which you may consider yourself bound towards me. I do not insult myself, nor question your generous confidence in me, to such an extent as to give you more than these few words of assurance that I am detailing the true motives which lead me to take this step. Never can I love another, Eustace! My heart will remain the sacred shrine in which your image must be preserved to the end of my existence. I feel that I am performing a solemn and a holy duty in the course which I am now pursuing; and the consciousness that it is so, lifts me above utter wretchedness and embues me with the tranquillity of resignation. It has been a bright and delicious dream—

the brightest and most delicious that ever visited mortal creature! But it has gone—it is dissipated—and heaven has willed that it should be so. May that same heaven shower upon your head, dear Eustace, its choicest blessings! May it enable you to support this calamity with the same fortitude and resignation which it has already vouchsafed unto me! I keep the ring which you gave me, as a memento of that bright and delicious dream of which I have spoken: I keep it as a pledge of a love which was not destined to be crowned with happiness, but of a friendship which you will bear for me throughout life. God bless you, dearest Eustace!—and again I implore that heaven will shower its choicest bounties upon your head.

"Your sincere and affectionate friend,
"MARY."

The reader must not however fancy that I was endowed with all the fortitude, all the strength, or all the resignation of which I spoke in my letter. I wept bitter burning tears as I penned it; and at every sentence was I constrained to leave off until the paroxysm of anguish so constantly recurring, should have subsided. But when it was concluded I did experience a degree of calm which I had scarcely dared anticipate; and having sealed and addressed the letter, I took it to the post-office. Not for an instant did I hesitate to hand it to the person receiving the letters; for I felt that I was performing an imperious duty, and one which in after life I could look back upon with a virtuous though melancholy satisfaction. It was done: the letter was received—the postage was paid—and as I quitted the shop where the district office was established, it seemed as if I had suddenly entered upon a new phase of being, and as if transported all in a moment from a sun-lit to a sun-less clime. In the Arctic regions there is a long, long night of winter, lasting for many months, during which the sun appears not, and the darkness is only relieved by the glimmering reflection of the ice and the coruscations of the Aurora Borealis. Conceive a denizen of the sunny regions of the tropics, where the sun shines for such long, long days, and the night is scarcely a night at all, suddenly transported into the midst of that polar region,—conceive this, I say, and then some idea may be formed of the sensations inspired by the sudden change which had taken place in my own position.

But as I retraced my way from the post-office to the villa, I gave not vent to any violence of grief. A few tears trickled down my cheeks: I wiped them away, and studied to maintain an exterior calm, which was however difficult—for my heart was bleeding inwardly.

A month passed; and during this interval I acquired great strength of mind. I saw the absolute necessity of conquering those feelings which, if given way to, would in my weaker moments have overwhelmed me with affliction. But I did not seek to banish the image of Eustace from my heart: it would have been impossible, even if I had attempted it. On the contrary, I experienced a holy satisfaction in contemplating it; and I prayed to heaven that when we should meet again, nothing that might take place would induce me to swerve from that course into which the sense of duty had impelled me.

The end of February arrived; and I took my usual holiday. I felt anxious relative to my sister Sarah, and at once proceeded as usual to Mar-

garet Street. When the livery-servant answered my summons, I at once perceived that he eyed me in a particular manner; and when I said, "Is Mrs. Selden at home?" he did not immediately answer. What could this mean? A frightful uneasiness seized upon me; and I could not repeat the question.

"Is that you, Mary?" exclaimed Mr. Selden, suddenly issuing from the ground-floor parlour. "Walk in: I wish to speak to you."

I accordingly entered that apartment—threw a hasty glance around—but perceived not Sarah. Perhaps she was in the drawing-room up-stairs? and yet I know not how it was—but the presentiment struck me that this idea would not be confirmed.

"Well, Mary," said Mr. Selden, in a mournful voice, although he was evidently striving to appear cheerful, "you have come to see Sarah? But I regret to have bad news for you:"—and now he bit his lip with visible emotion.

"Bad news?" I echoed, with anguish in my brain: "what do you mean?"—for I felt assured that Sarah was not dead—otherwise he would not have striven to assume a cheerful and off-hand air.

"I mean," he answered, "that she has left me."

"Ah!"—and for an instant it was with a feeling of joy that I received the announcement.

"Yes: she has left me—she has fled with a villain!" he added bitterly.

Good heavens, I understood it all! I staggered as if smitten with a sudden blow, and tottered to a seat, where I remained, speechlessly gazing upon Edgar Selden in amazement and dismay.

"I knew you would be shocked—I felt convinced of it," he said. "I am really sorry to have such bad tidings to impart: but it is the truth—and therefore useless to keep it from you."

"Oh, Mr. Selden!" I exclaimed, in the wildness of my grief: "you have done this! you have driven her from you! And she is lost—she is lost!" I added, wringing my hands frantically.

"I can forgive these expressions, Mary," he said: "but they are not the truth. Did I not tell you, when last you were here, that although the day of separation must come, I would not leave Sarah in poverty? No: I swear to you that the day before yesterday I went to my solicitor, and instructed him to prepare a deed, by which I pledged myself to settle an annuity of fifty pounds a-year upon Sarah. There is the draft of it:"—and taking a paper from the table, he handed it to me.

I took it mechanically—but instantaneously giving it back again, said, "No, Mr. Selden, I do not wish to read it: I believe you. But tell me how this has happened?"

"You were no stranger, Mary, to the life which I led with your sister: but even the scenes you did behold, were nothing to those that took place when we were alone together. You recollect that she reproached me the last time you were here for spending my evenings away from home? After you were gone, I represented to her that if she would faithfully promise to conduct herself becomingly and abstain from any violent outburst of passion, I would remain at home as when we were first together, and would receive my friends here. She gave me the promise I required; and I invited my

friends. Amongst them was a Captain Tollemache——”

“Captain Tollemache?” I ejaculated, with a start: for I knew that he *was* a villain.

“Yes: I am aware that you had some knowledge of him—for when he learnt who Sarah was, he told me how you were in service with some family at Winchester—and so forth. Sarah likewise recognized him. She saw him inflict chastisement upon a certain Sir Aubrey Clavering at Herne Bay——”

“But how could you have associated with such a man?” I asked indignantly.

“He had done nothing that I could quarrel with, Mary,” replied Selden. “What to me was his intrigue with Lady Davenant? If I were to cut all the men I know who have done similar things, I should have no friends nor acquaintances at all. And they, too, for the same reason might cut me. However, this Tollemache is a villain. He has taken away your sister:—she fled with him yesterday! He has lately inherited some money——”

“Mr. Selden,” I said, in a voice almost suffocated with anguished emotions, “it is you who were the primal cause of working all this ruin for my poor sister. Had you espoused her—had you made her your wife, I feel convinced that it would all have been very different. Oh, Mr. Selden! for the remainder of your days must the sense of the ruin you have wrought, cling to you like a remorse. It *will* be a remorse! Man of the world though you are, you will not be enabled to put it away from you. You may plunge into pleasure—and it will pursue you: you may throw yourself headlong into the vortex of dissipation—and it will haunt you. Miserable man that you are, I cannot look upon you otherwise than with horror and aversion!”

“These are strong terms,” he said, pale and trembling; “and I think——”

“Oh, sir! it is impossible you can find justification for your conduct. Consider the youth and the inexperience of that poor girl. She loved you—and you took the basest advantage of her confiding affection. Good God! when I think of the arts and wiles which you practised to seduce her from the path of virtue, it almost drives me mad! Had she been ten years older—an experienced woman—it would have been bad enough: but a young creature, not seventeen years of age—Oh, Mr. Selden! your conduct has been that of a villain—abominable beyond the power of language to express! I leave you, sir; but never under any circumstances can I forgive you. No—I cannot!”

He still continued pale and trembling, and for a moment had not a word to say. I rose—threw upon him one look of bitter reproach—and was about to quit the room, when he sprang forward, saying, “For God’s sake, Mary, do not leave me in this manner! I am unhappy enough as it is.”

“I cannot—I dare not, recall one syllable I have uttered, nor offer you my sympathy;”—and thus speaking, I broke forcibly from him and quitted the house. When I passed forth into the street, there was such a dizziness in my brain that the very houses appeared to be swimming round. I walked onward, as if in a wildering maze. Good heavens! what would become of my poor sister? Was she not now entering upon a career which already deserved the stigma of utter profligacy? Oh, to re-

deem her—to redeem her! I felt that I would lay down my life to do it. But for some minutes I was incapable of serious reflection. All my ideas were in confusion: all my thoughts were in a whirling hurricane—but accompanied by the acutest anguish. My temples throbbed—my eye-balls burnt, yet shed no tears. It was thus that I pursued my way through the streets—or rather hurried onward, without any settled purpose—without knowing where I was going—without taking heed of the persons who were passing, or the objects around me. I was walking as if under the influence of a horrible nightmare.

By degrees my brain recovered its equilibrium—my thoughts settled themselves somewhat—and I looked about me to see where I was. I had mechanically advanced in the direction of Brewer Street,—which was natural enough, as that had usually been the second visit I was wont to pay on my day’s holiday, after calling at Mr. Selden’s. But now I suddenly recollected that the Alderman’s daughters were no longer there. I stopped short, and asked myself whether I should go, and what I should do? All in a moment the thought flashed to my mind that the Gipsy Queen knew a great deal about Captain Tollemache, and that probably she would be enabled to assist me to ascertain his place of abode. I had not thought of asking that question of Mr. Selden: I did not choose to return to Margaret Street to make the inquiry; and indeed, I fancied from the way in which he had spoken of Sarah’s flight, that he himself was at a loss where to seek for Tollemache. But Barbauld Azetha had known where to write to him when she wished to make him the object of her vengeance in respect to Sir Aubrey Clavering and Lady Davenant; and perhaps she might be able to assist me with the information I sought? I resolved to bend my way to St. Giles’s, in the hope of finding her there. I had little fear of failing to discover the house; but I did not exactly know my way to St. Giles’s from Brewer Street. I inquired of a shop-keeper, and was directed how to proceed. But as I continued my walk, I again relapsed into a maze of wildering thoughts—and proceeded onwards without noting the direction I was taking. I inquired my way again—and again after being put right, did I relapse into that confusion of the ideas. At length, once more awakening from that anguished reverie, I found myself in a narrow street, on one side of which was a long gloomy colonnade, projecting from a dingy and prison-like building. I glanced back, and recognized Covent Garden market. I had wandered considerably out of my way; and again stepping into a shop, made the requisite inquiry. I now learnt that I was in Russell Street, and that the gloomy-looking building was Drury Lane Theatre. Just at the moment I was issuing from the shop, I heard myself called by name—and recognized Robert’s voice. He was standing at a door opening into the theatre; and beckoned me across to him. I accordingly obeyed his summons; and at the first glance perceived that he was dressed in the shabbiest manner, with his coat buttoned across his chest in order to conceal his soiled linen, a glimpse of which however too plainly showed that his shirt had not been changed for at least a week. Nevertheless, he appeared to be in high spirits, and had an air of insolent self-sufficiency about him

which made me immediately suspect he was engaged in some new scheme which he hoped would prove successful.

"Well, Mary, out for your month's holiday, I suppose?" he said. "It seems we are often destined to meet on such occasions. But you look uncommon miserable. What the deuce is the matter with you now? Why, you are whimpering! There never was such a girl in the whole world: you have always got something to trouble you—or else you make troubles for yourself."

"Robert," I said, speaking with difficulty—for I was indeed weeping—"one of the bitterest troubles that I have yet known, is upon my mind. Sarah, our unfortunate sister—"

"Well, what about her?" demanded my brother, as if he did not very much care to be troubled with whatsoever information I was about to give him.

"She is pursuing a career which must lead to ruin," I answered solemnly: "she has left Mr. Selden—"

"Ah—Selden, was it? Well, you never told me his name before."

"And she is gone with another," I continued, weeping still more bitterly.

"Come—what nonsense is this! I suppose that she has bettered herself, as people say in service. Beg pardon, Mary—meant no offence—"

"Oh! I am not humiliated by the fact of being in service. Would to heaven," I continued, bitterly, "that I was never compelled to feel humiliated on account of others."

"Ah! *that*, I suppose, is meant as a slap at me," he ejaculated. "But perhaps you will talk in a different strain when Tomlinson comes out:—and he glanced over his shoulder into the somewhat dark passage with which the open door of the theatre communicated. "Why, what do you think? Tomlinson is at this moment signing a bargain with the committee for Drury Lane!"

"If, Robert," I said, "you propose to return to the stage as an honourable means of obtaining your living, I shall be rejoiced—"

"Oh! don't think I am going to act any more," he cried. "I have had enough of that! I am going to be treasurer: for Tomlinson is sure to get the theatre—and he of course will be Sole Lessee."

"Unless he deceives you, Robert," I at once rejoined: "for if he has obtained funds sufficient to take this theatre, how is it that he has left you in such a condition?"—and I looked hard at his apparel.

"Funds? What nonsense!" ejaculated my brother with a laugh. "He has not got a penny—not a single penny!—and when he comes out of the committee-room, I know he will be as hungry and thirsty as possible: so if you would just lend us five shillings to get a dinner at the public over the way, or half-a-crown will do—"

Profoundly as I was afflicted,—and uppermost as Sarah's circumstances were in my mind,—I could not help gazing at my brother in astonishment at what he was saying. The idea that Mr. Tomlinson, without a single penny in his pocket, should take Drury Lane Theatre, seemed to me either a preposterous falsehood or a ludicrous farce: nay, worse—a flagrant dishonesty.

"Oh, you may look!" cried Robert: "but I can tell you it's perfectly true. Tomlinson is signing the

papers now," he continued, lowering his voice: "but if there's so much as a shilling stamp to pay for, or a penn'orth of wafers to be fetched, I know deuced well he hasn't got the means. Now, you see what a clever fellow Tomlinson is, and what a fool I should have been to leave him. It's an understood thing between us—he's to be Sole Lessee, and I am to be treasurer. But come, Mary—lend us the five shillings: or else I'm hanged if we shall have any dinner to-day!"

I was drawing forth the money when Mr. Tomlinson appeared, with such an air of majestic importance that one would think he had got at least fifty thousand pounds in his pocket. He was a trifle better dressed than my brother, but still looked a very unfit person indeed—so far as his outward appearance was concerned—to undertake such a colossal speculation.

"It is done, illustrious friend of mine!" he exclaimed, addressing himself to Robert; "and in me dost thou behold the Sole Lessee of Old Drury! Mine is the proud destiny of resuscitating the drama's true legitimacy—and next Monday night shall I appear as Macbeth before a crowded and admiring audience. Ah, matchless princess—dark-eyed sister of my friend—"

But I stayed not to hear another word. I should not have even lingered to hear what I did, were it not that Robert, turning towards the manager in his anxiety to hear the result, had forgotten to take the money from my hand. Now I thrust it into his palm, and hurried away. I bent my steps towards St. Giles's, which neighbourhood I reached in a few minutes; and then I had to hunt about for that sordid-looking dwelling where on two occasions I had been conducted by Barbauld Azetha. Then it was in the darkness that I had threaded the maze of St. Giles; and I now discovered that I had not retained a sufficient impression of the whereabouts of her house to find my way to it. I wandered about for nearly an hour, through that labyrinth of vile streets and loathsome alleys—plunging into every court—but without success. At length I was on the point of giving up the search, and deliberating whether I should go over to Norwood and pursue my inquiries there—when all of a sudden I beheld her approaching me. She was dressed in her gipsy garb—her short skirts displaying her robust but well turned ankles, and a bright silk handkerchief tied loosely over her head. Heavy tresses of her coal black hair, escaping from beneath that kerchief, rested upon her sloping shoulders; and as she drew near, she bestowed upon me a friendly smile which displayed her brilliant teeth.

"You are searching for me, Mary," she at once said, with that habit which she had of always pretending to give a positive interpretation to one's thoughts or intentions, as if she had some intuitive knowledge of what they were. "Come: my house is close by."

Then, leading the way up a narrow alley which I had overlooked, she conducted me into a court; and in a few moments stopped at the house. With a latch-key, which she carried in her hand, she opened the door, and admitted me into the place. All was silent within; and I concluded that there were no other residents there at the time. She conducted me up the stairs to that room which I have before described, and which was of precisely the same



pearance as when I was there last. The great volume, containing the private information which she rendered so available, lay upon the table; and I observed that the Gipsy Queen smiled significantly as she glanced at it. She bade me be seated—and then waited for me to explain the object of my visit, which she did not make any pretence to divine.

"You remember," I said, "that when I last saw you, I told you how afflicted I was concerning my poor sister. Since that time I have seen her frequently. But she has fled from him who first enticed her away; and yesterday she surrendered herself up to one whom you know well—Captain Tollemache!"

"Ah!—and you wish me to discover where Captain Tollemache is. Is it not so?"

"It is," was my response. "Methought that perhaps you might be acquainted with his present place of abode; and if so, I would repair thither—

I would even seek to drag my sister away by force—O heavens! what will become of her?"—and again the tears poured down my cheeks.

"Poor girl!" said the Gipsy Queen in a tone of the deepest sympathy: "what sorrows you have to endure—you who so little deserve to endure them! Ah! when I think that I was ever an accessory in any scheme of wickedness against you, Mary Price, I am so enraged with myself—so ashamed—so humiliated——"

"Mention it not, Barbauld!" I said, deeply touched by the unfeigned penitence of her manner; "have you not made the fullest atonement? did you not save my life from those monsters at Herne Bay? But I fear that you are not acquainted with the residence of Captain Tollemache?"

"Not now," rejoined the Gipsy Queen: "but I will discover it for you, if possible. Tell me where a note will find you:"—then, when I mentioned my

abode, she added, "But I shall only write in case of success. If I fail, you will not hear from me at all: my silence will show that I have been unable to do your bidding. But should I succeed, Mary, can I help you in rescuing your sister from that man? If you will that she should be carried off by force, it can be done. Some of my people shall accomplish this."

"I know not how to act—I am bewildered what to do!" was my answer. "But if you succeed, Barbauld, in discovering this villain's abode, write to me at once—and I will perhaps come to you and ask your advice: for I fear indeed that my unaided entreaties will produce but little effect with my misguided sister!"

"Believe me, Mary," rejoined Barbauld, "I shall be only too happy to render you any service. You have not been into Kent since I saw you last? No. But I have. I was in the neighbourhood of Canterbury a week back. Perhaps you at once conjecture that I was impelled thither by curiosity to learn the mode of existence which is being led by that man whom I shall never name again? Well, it was so. He is there—dwelling at his country mansion, and in comparative seclusion. The loss of his arm has afflicted him dreadfully. His pride has been humbled—he feels that he can no longer go forth in the glory of his personal beauty to captivate and beguile the too confiding heart of woman. His health has suffered—he is ill—I even heard a rumour that his physicians fear he is falling into a decline. How true this may be, I know not. I did not see him: I did not seek to see him. My vengeance was satisfied; and I would not throw myself in his way with the appearance of gloating over him. No—I could not do that!"

"Perhaps, Barbauld," I said, "you still entertain—"

"Do not speak it!" she interrupted me, almost passionately. "Yes—that feeling *does* linger in the depth of my heart; and there are moments when I even regret—Yet—no: this is weakness: I must not give way to it. What think you has become of Lady Davenant? You know not, of course. Almost immediately after she separated from him whom I name not, it appears that she went to Hastings—doubtless in the hope of captivating some new admirer. She purchased a beautiful horse, and was accustomed to ride out, attended by a groom in tasteful livery. One day she was thrown from the spirited steed: she fell with her face amidst a pile of flints on the road-side—and her beauty was ruined for ever. Indeed, she was utterly disfigured; and through grief at the loss of her charms, she went raving mad. She is now the occupant of a lunatic-asylum, without a hope being entertained of her recovery!"

"Oh, what a fearful termination of her guilty career!" I exclaimed, shuddering to the innermost confines of my being, as I thought of what perhaps might be the erring and unfortunate Sarah's fate also.

"Yes—such is the close of that woman's career:"—then after a brief pause, the Gipsy Queen observed, looking me earnestly in the face, "And with regard to yourself, Mary—should you be happy were it not on account of domestic troubles? In your own individual affairs are you satisfied? I know that Lord Wilborton is dead. I read it in the

newspaper between two and three months back. May I hope that——"

"I know what you would say, Barbauld," I interrupted her. "Everything is at an end there!"—and I averted my countenance to conceal my tears.

"But surely he——Captain Quentin," she said, hesitatingly: and then she immediately exclaimed, "Believe me, dear Mary, if I question you thus, it is only in the most friendly spirit, and because I am really and truly interested in you."

"No, no," I said vehemently: "it is I who have done it all! A sense of duty——"

"Ah, Mary!" she observed, with a mournful shake of the head: "your ideas of duty are so nice and punctilious, that they will always prove barriers to your happiness. And yet," she immediately added, "if there be justice in heaven, you will yet be happy upon earth. Yes, yes—I am sure you will;—you would be wrong to abandon hope!"

"I dare not yield myself up to it, Barbauld," I said: and then bidding her farewell, I hurriedly took my departure.

When I reached Sunbeam Villa at about eight o'clock in the evening, after having paid my usual visit to Mrs. Chaplin, I ascended to my own chamber to take off my things, and perceived a sealed packet lying upon the table. Ah! it was a letter from Eustace Quentin. I recognised the well-known—yes, and the well-beloved handwriting! It had evidently been delivered by the postman after I had gone out in the morning, and was therefore placed in my room that I might find it on my return. Oh! how could I nerve myself to read all the affectionate outpourings of love I knew it would contain?—how could I strengthen my heart with fortitude sufficient to resist the impressions that it would be too well calculated to make upon me? Never shall I forget the feeling which seized upon me at that moment. It was a letter written, no doubt, in the fullest confidence that it would carry joy to my soul;—and yet a short month only had elapsed since I had committed to the post-office a communication which in itself was the suicidal death-blow of all my happiness. For a few minutes I dared not open that letter. I wept abundantly:—the tears relieved me somewhat—and then I broke the seal. The envelope contained a very long letter; and it was with a dimness of the sight and a suffocating sensation at the heart, that I sat down to peruse it. It was written in the form of a diary—a kind of journal, recording incidents and feelings which Eustace had committed to paper at short intervals. Need I say that he never seemed wearied of giving me assurances of undying, unalterable affection? But let me, for more reasons than one, transcribe here the last few paragraphs of this journal:—

"Madras, October 8th, 1831.

"Eleven o'clock at night.

"This morning, dearest Mary, I accompanied my friend, Henry Crawford in a long ride about the environs of Madras. His melancholy increases; and me thought that the exercise would do him good. But I was mistaken. He spoke much of the object of his love—but whom he has not as yet named to me. More than ever does he seem to entertain the conviction that he shall never behold her again. I endeavoured to reason with him against this belief—for which he really seems to have no ground; inasmuch as he lately received a

letter from her, dated at the beginning of May, when she was in good health. It appears that she is an only daughter, and resides with her father (who is a widower) in Essex. Crawford's relations likewise dwell in that county; and I remember that about two years back, when our regiment was stationed in Ireland, he had six months' leave of absence on account of ill-health. He visited his friends in Essex; and it was during that period he formed this romantic attachment for the young lady. Throughout our ride of this morning he was dull and desponding to such an extent that it even affected my own spirits, and filled me with something like a presentiment of evil. But I do not readily yield, dear Mary, to such feelings; and I soon conquered them. For I am full of confidence in the present, and of hope in the future. I know that you love me as devotedly as I love you—and that it is impossible either of us can change. Thank heaven! this climate produces not the slightest pernicious effect upon me; my health is vigorous; but then, I am regular and temperate in my habits. Half the officers, who are believed to die from the effects of the climate, really kill themselves with dissipation and pleasure.

"This evening I dined with the Governor of Madras, who is most friendly towards me. He is the brother of Lord G—, who was one of the leading Members of the Administration about two years ago. On returning to my quarters I have seated myself to pen these few lines ere retiring to rest. Good night, dearest Mary. Need I assure you that your image is ever uppermost in my thoughts? It attends upon me by day: it smiles upon me through my dreams by night. Adieu for the present, dearest and best beloved girl!"

"October 9th.

"Eleven o'clock in the Forenoon.

"My own dearest Mary, what have I just heard! I know not whether my amazement was greater than the feeling of love and gratitude which I experienced at the time. Oh! and it was done in such a delicate manner too!—and you have left me to find it out by accident! I have just come from a business-interview with the Governor. He received despatches from England, as well as private letters, this morning. One of these private letters was from his brother Lord G—, the ex-Minister. It appears that his lordship, having now retired into private life, is fond of letter-writing; and for the amusement of his brother the Governor of Madras, fills his epistles with entertaining anecdotes and personal reminiscences. One of these anecdotes in the letter received this morning, was relative to a certain pocket-book which Lord G— dropped on a certain occasion in the Green Park. And, Oh, Mary! that pocket-book was picked up by yourself—and the reward you asked for its restoration was my promotion to a Captaincy. God bless you, dearest Mary! You remember, I wrote to you at the time to tell you I was at a loss to discover how I had obtained it,—as it was without purchase, and my father was then in no humour to interest himself on my behalf. But now the mystery is cleared up by accident, through the medium of a pleasant gossiping letter written by Lord G— to his brother the Governor of this Presidency. Again and again must you accept my thanks, beloved Mary. Oh! what a heart must you not possess!—am I not proud of you, as much as I love you? Lord G—, knowing that my regiment is stationed here, wrote his brother the anecdote, *à propos* 'of a young officer whom he would be likely to fall in with.' Those were his words: but he enjoined the Governor not to reveal the secret of my promotion to my ears if he found that I still remained ignorant of it: for he added that you, dear Mary, had enjoined such secrecy when the transaction took place. But the Governor, who is the last man in the world to keep a secret, rallied me jocularly upon the subject, and then showed me Lord G—'s letter. Ah! you should see in what high terms Lord G— mentions the modest delicacy and lady-like nature of your conduct on that occasion! Dearest Mary, how I long to repeat in words those enthusiastic thanks that I again reiterate in writing!"

"Same date.

"Eleven o'clock at night.

"Before retiring to rest, I take up my pen to add a few words to what I have written above. I have been thinking ever since the morning of your noble conduct towards me; and more than ever, if possible, do I urge and entreat that you will come out to join me as soon as circumstances will allow, that our hands may be united. This evening Henry Crawford came and sat two hours with me. He was as desponding as yesterday. I could not help telling him the affecting incident which I had learnt in the morning—how I was indebted to you for the rask I hold. For the first time I mentioned your name. He was melted even to tears, as he listened to that narrative of delicate love and devoted affection on your part; then, in a similar spirit of confidence, he revealed to me the name of her whom he loves so profoundly. It is Sybilla Trevanion. He again touched upon that wild and romantic agreement which he and his Sybilla made together ere he took leave of her in England; and he expressed his renewed conviction that should either die the spirit of the departed would appear to the survivor in the very first moment after dissolution. How strange, Mary, is this belief—the mere entertainment of which appears to fill my poor friend's mind with the gloomiest forebodings and the darkest presentiments of evil. Good night, dearest girl; a thousand blessings upon your head!"

"Just as I had written those last words, my servant informed me that one of the Company's fastest ships leaves Madras at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. I therefore purpose to send this journal by it; and I add these few lines to repeat, dearest Mary, the assurances of my imperishable affection—to beseech that you will cheer your spirits as much as possible—and likewise to reiterate the hope that circumstances will permit you to come out and join me sooner than you led me to expect when we parted in England. By the next ship I shall write more on this subject, and shall remit to my army-agent in London the requisite funds for the purpose. Adieu, dearest girl—adieu, for the present!"

"October 10th

"Half-past six o'clock in the morning.

"Good heavens, dearest Mary! such a fearful event! I have but a moment to inform you that my poor friend Henry Crawford has been drowned. He rose early to bathe, according to his wont: the surf was running high—and half-an-hour back he perished! The lamentable tidings have this instant reached me!"

The letter dropped from my hand. I was confounded: an awful dismay seized upon me. *For when it was six o'clock on the morning of the 10th of October at Madras, it was one o'clock at night in London;* and it was precisely at this latter hour that the apparition of Henry Crawford had stood by the bedside of Sybilla Trevanion!

CHAPTER CXXI.

TIDINGS FROM INDIA.

THE varied feelings which had been so strongly, so painfully, and likewise so tenderly excited within me by all that concerned Eustace or myself in the letter which I had just received, were suddenly absorbed and swallowed up—if I may use the term—in this fearful consternation which seized upon me at the intelligence conveyed in that postscript-paragraph. Alas, poor Sybilla! Her presentiments were but too true; and she must now prepare to fulfil the promise made to her father and become the bride of the detested Mr. Woodville. But what could I think of her superstitious narrative now? Dared I disbelieve it? dared I attribute it

to a mere coincidence? No: awful and solemn were the reflections that arose within me; and I could no longer doubt that there might on occasions be a more intimate connexion between this world and the realm of spirits than I had ever previously supposed possible. I felt that a great change had suddenly taken place within me. I was always a firm believer in the truths of religion, and in God's providence. I was accustomed to pray regularly, and to attend church-worship as often as my position in life would permit. But I had never carried my piety to a maudlin extreme—nor had made religious exercises or observances a source of gloom or self-mortification. I believe I may say that I was properly devout, and nothing more! But now I felt superstitious; and I sorrowed that the veil should have been thus far withdrawn from before my mental vision: for I did not conceive that it would add to my mind's tranquillity or comfort in life.

But had Sybilla yet received any tidings from India? and if not, should I gently and delicately break to her the intelligence which had just reached me? No: I thought not. I could not bring myself to do it. It was a task too painful to undertake. Securing the letter in my writing-desk, I composed my feelings and my looks as well as I was able, and descended to the kitchen, to wait as usual until Miss Trevanion's chamber-bell should ring: for it was now past ten o'clock, and as there was no company at the villa on this particular evening, I knew that the household would retire early. Not many minutes elapsed ere the expected summons took place; and as I ascended to Sybilla's room, I nerved myself with all the fortitude and self-possession I could command, in order to avoid being betrayed by anything she might say, into a look or word to show that I was acquainted with the saddest intelligence. She was seated near the toilet-table when I entered, and appeared to be very thoughtful. She glanced kindly at me—but did not immediately speak. I began to arrange the luxuriant masses of her raven hair for the night-toilet; and I noticed that she looked at herself more fixedly in the mirror which stood upon the toilet-table, than was her wont.

"Do you not think, Mary," she inquired, after a long silence, "that I have grown much paler of late? I never had more than a slight tinge of colour; but even that has gone;"—then without waiting for my reply, she added, "Ah! mine is a destiny that few would have the fortitude to bear up against! And yet you perceive that I have demonstrated all the courage and the resignation which some months back I assured you I should display. There have been times when my dear aunt has questioned me whether I had anything upon my mind: but I have assured her to the contrary—and she has been lulled into that belief. Poor soul! I would not for the world suffer her to be tortured on my account. No—and often have I sat down to the piano or the harp in order to afford her pleasure, but when my own spirits were little enough inclined for music. Ah! speaking of music, reminds me that only a few days back she observed how completely I had altered my style of melody—and that whereas, when I was first here, I was wont to ring forth spirited measures from either instrument, I have for months past played airs of a

plaintive and mournful character. Perhaps, Mary," added Miss Trevanion, in a deeply mournful voice, "the time will soon come when I shall never play again—no, never—never!"

I made no answer. What could I say? I dared not encourage hope, nor proffer consolation: I dared not speak cheerfully, nor yet ominously. But Sybilla observed a cloud gather upon my features: for my face, as I stood behind her, was reflected in the mirror which fronted her, and on which her eyes were fixed at the time.

"You are sad, Mary—you are very sad," she said, turning round and gazing up towards me: then rising from the chair, she placed herself upon the couch at the foot of the bed, saying, "Let us sit here for a few minutes to converse ere we proceed with my night-toilet. Come—sit down by my side;"—and then, as I did so, she took my hand, and looking me earnestly in the face, went on to say, "I understand full well, dear girl, wherefore you are sad. You sorrow on my account? You tremble lest my forebodings should prove too true, and that the mournful incident of the tenth of October should be realized by the tidings which now may be daily and hourly expected from India? Yes," she continued, casting down her looks and speaking in accents of melancholy musing,—"in a few days—perhaps in a few hours—intelligence must arrive. To-morrow may not pass without beholding the confirmation of all that I myself feel persuaded has in reality happened. But sorrow not for me, dear Mary! When the tidings come they will not take me unprepared. It will be no sudden blow thus struck—nothing to horrify me all in a moment. That he is dead, I am convinced: that he died at the hour which I have named, is certain—at least in my estimation. The manner of his death is alone to be cleared up!"

I could not restrain my tears. There was I, possessed of the secret—yet daring not to reveal it! It was a moment of cruel anguish for me;—because I loved Sybilla Trevanion, and I deeply, deeply compassionated her!

"Oh! weep not for me, my dear friend!" she continued, pressing my hand affectionately. "I have for too long a time looked this calamity in the face not to be prepared to meet it. I have counted the months—the weeks—the days—almost the very hours, that must elapse ere tidings could be received from India; and think you that this has not been an ordeal sufficient to model my mind to the acceptance of my destiny? Mary, close upon five months have elapsed since that tenth of October, the incident of which must now so soon be confirmed!"

I said nothing. I had wiped away my tears, and was stifling my grief as well as I was able. Miss Trevanion now resumed the night-toilet; and in another quarter of an hour I took leave of her. When I gained my own room, I sat down and read Captain Quentin's journal all over once more. I now gave myself up entirely to the feelings which it produced in respect to my own position. The most generous love was breathed throughout that document: the most fervid devotion that ever man offered to woman, was expressed there. And this love could no longer be mine: I must cease to be the object of that devotion! No—not so: the feelings themselves might endure, even as my love and devotion towards him would last for ever: but they

were not to be crowned with happiness! Oh! cruel system of society, which places some of this world's occupants on such lofty pedestals, and assigns to others so lowly a lot, that the best and purest affections of the heart must be stifled, or at least outraged, rather than permit the union of one of the former class with one of the latter!

When I retired to rest and thought that I was about to close my eyes in sleep, I dreaded to open them on the morrow. I felt assured that on the day which was next to be born, the sad intelligence must reach Sybilla Trevanion that would confirm her presentiment and give her the assurance that the vision of the tenth of October was indeed as she believed it—a reality! While these thoughts were agitating in my brain, sleep gradually came upon my eyes; and when I awoke, it was broad daylight. I looked at my watch: it was past eight o'clock. I had slept much later than usual—no doubt in consequence of the harassing fatigues which my mind had gone through on the preceding day on account of Sarah. I hastily dressed myself, and descended to Miss Trevanion's chamber. She was already up, and partially attired. I apologized for being so late: but she bade me never address her in that strain, as she regarded me as a friend, and not in any other light. Presently she descended to the breakfast-parlour; and I joined my fellow-servants. I was exceedingly restless and uneasy—so much so, that they perceived it. But I evaded their questions, and they did not press them. I soon ascended again to Sybilla's chamber, and from the window looked anxiously for the coming of the postman. Yes—I watched to see whether he would stop at the house: but he passed by—and I experienced a temporary feeling of relief. Methought that it was a reprieve for poor Sybilla. But then the thought arose in my mind that it could not be through the means of a letter from India she would hear of what had occurred—inasmuch as Henry Crawford had made but one confidant—namely Eustace; and Eustace of course would not write to Sybilla—nor did he even know where she was now staying. And another thought occurred to me—which was, that perhaps the ship which had brought my letter, would not bring any intelligence at all of Mr. Crawford's death: for Eustace's postscript had been penned but half-an-hour before that ship was to sail. It was possible that even a month might elapse before the tidings should reach England—unless, indeed, those on board the ship which brought my letter, had heard of the accident ere the anchor was weighed.

While I was revolving all these things in my mind, a carriage drove up to the garden-gate; and I immediately recognized Mr. Trevanion's equipage. Now I felt assured that the tidings had reached him, and that he was come to impart them to his daughter. Unhappy Sybilla, I thought to myself: within an hour—perhaps within a few minutes—she would know the worst. But then, was it not known to her already? was it not indeed known to her within the very instant it had occurred, all excepting the manner of her beloved one's death?

Mr. Trevanion alighted from the carriage, and entered the house. I remained in Sybilla's chamber in a state of excruciating suspense. I felt as much for her as if the circumstances were all my own—I completely identified myself with her position.

Perhaps I even felt more acutely on her behalf than she could do on her own: because her mind was so steadily, firmly, and indubitably made up to the truth of the catastrophe. Half-an-hour elapsed—and at length I heard footsteps approaching the door: it opened, and Sybilla entered. She was deadly pale; and her countenance displayed a rigid firmness—the firmness of a mind made up to the acceptance of a deplorable destiny.

"My father is come," she said; "and he has asked me to go out with him. I know what this means. He has received some intelligence which he is desirous of imparting. He betrayed nothing by his looks in the presence of my aunt—but spoke with a well-assumed off-handedness on various indifferent things. It was a relief to me when he bade me come up and put on my bonnet that I might go out and walk with him."

"And are you nerved, dear Miss Trevanion? are you sure that you are nerved?"

"Firmly so," she responded, in a voice that was deadly cold, but otherwise emotionless. "Ah, Mary! I see that you are no longer a sceptic—but that you yourself now dread the worst on my account."

"God grant, dear Miss Trevanion," I said, "that your courage may not fail you!"

"There is no fear, Mary!"—and then she put on her walking-apparel with a calmness which convinced me that her words were not rashly nor idly spoken.

I should observe that the carriage had driven away from the vicinage of the house, in order to be put up at the adjacent stables; and thus I concluded that Mr. Trevanion intended to pass some hours—perhaps the entire day at Sunbeam Villa. The young lady descended from the chamber; and soon afterwards I saw her go forth, leaning upon her father's arm. In a few moments they were out of sight; and I experienced a prolongation of the saddest feelings, until I beheld them return again. They were two hours absent; and the moment Sybilla entered the house, she ascended straight to her chamber, where I had remained the whole time she was absent. Full of acute suspense indeed, was the look that I flung upon her as she made her appearance; and I at once saw by her countenance that she now knew all. She had been weeping—and that was natural enough, notwithstanding her assurance of continued firmness: but she was not weeping now—and it was only a close observer who could have perceived that tears had so recently flowed from her eyes.

"Mary," she said, fixing a look of profound melancholy upon me, "all is confirmed: he is no more!"

She sat down: I mechanically took off her bonnet and shawl, and placed them upon the bed: but my eyes were dimmed with tears, and I scarcely knew what I was doing. Suddenly, and in obedience to an irresistible impulse, I threw my arms around her neck, and embracing her, wept bitterly. Her tears gushed forth anew—she likewise wept,—and for a few minutes the paroxysms of her grief were violent to a degree. Oh! it is so easy to talk of continued firmness—but so difficult for even the strongest mind to maintain it.

"The intelligence of his death has arrived," she said, when that tempest of affliction was passed

and calmness came back again. "On the morning of the tenth of October a ship left Madras. It weighed anchor precisely at seven o'clock. At six o'clock—exactly one hour previously—Henry Crawford perished in the surf while bathing. Several persons beheld the accident, and dashed forward gallantly to his rescue: but when he was brought on shore, life was extinct. Such is the report brought by the officers of that ship."

It was in a voice profoundly mournful—Oh! so mournful, and so plaintively low—that Sybilla gave utterance to these words. Her accents were measured too, as if she dared not give way even to the excitement of hurried speech, lest her anguish should all break forth anew. There was a long, long pause,—a pause of at least ten minutes,—during which she sat wrapped up in her reflections, her countenance pale as marble—her eyes fixed—her lips apart.

"I have mentioned, my dear friend," she at length resumed, "the name of him who was the object of the sincerest and tenderest love that ever woman cherished towards man. I have mentioned that name in your hearing for the first time."

"I have long known it, dear Miss Trevanion," I answered.

"Ah! then is it possible?" she exclaimed. "But no, no—I am certain you did not! You assured me to the contrary—and I believed you *then*—I believe you *now*. Pardon me, dear Mary, the momentary suspicion. It was in reference to that portrait!"

I hastened to explain to Miss Trevanion by what means I had learnt various particulars concerning Henry Crawford. I told her much that related to myself and Eustace Quentin—I explained to her wherefore I had not shown her the letters I had received from him, in which her lover's name was mentioned—and then I went up to my chamber and fetched down those letters, so that she might not only be convinced of all I was narrating, but that she might see how devotedly Henry Crawford had loved her. She wept over these letters, which she perused throughout; and then embracing me, said, "It was the most generous and delicate consideration on your part, dear Mary, which made you withhold that first epistle from my knowledge. You feared it would afflict me by revealing my Henry's unhappiness?"—then as she dwelt with tearful eyes upon the postscript-lines appended to the second letter—or rather to the journal—she exclaimed, "Alas, yes! here is another confirmation, if any were wanted, of the truth of Henry's death. Now, Mary, I will give you a farther proof of my confidence in return for that which you have shown me."

Thus speaking, she took forth her jewel-box—opened it—and drew out the miniature. She contemplated it long and earnestly,—remaining motionless as a statue against the chest of drawers upon which she had placed the box. Her back was towards me, so that I beheld not her countenance as she thus gazed upon the portrait: but as she slowly turned round, I saw that her looks wore a sweet resignation now mingled with their sadness.

"Read the inscription at the back, Mary," she said, handing me the portrait.

I took it—and after gazing with melancholy interest upon the handsome countenance for a little while, turning the portrait over; and to my aston-

ishment, beheld the following words in beautifully enamelled letters at the back:—

HENRY CRAWFORD,
to
his beloved wife,
SYBILLA.
March 3. 1830.

"Now Mary, you are acquainted with all my secret!" resumed the unfortunate young widow—for such indeed I was now to regard her: then receiving back the portrait from my hands, she pressed it to her bosom and to her lips—gazed upon it with melancholy tenderness once more—and consigned it to the jewel-box. "You need no longer be surprised," she continued, making me sit down by her side upon the couch, "that I was so fearful you had seen that inscription the first day I was here. I did not know you *then* as I have known you since. But there was a sanctity in that secret which made it so completely my own, that even when I did learn to know you and to love you, I breathed it not to your ears. Yet all along, ever since that memorable night—the tenth of October—I resolved that when the confirmation of what I saw should arrive from India, I would reveal this secret. Therefore, even without the confidence you have shown me in respect to your own Captain Quentin, I should have made you acquainted with the inscription at the back of that portrait. Yes, Mary: when the time for separation drew near, and Henry Crawford was about to leave Essex, and rejoin his regiment in Ireland, I consented to a private marriage. It was solemnized under circumstances of the strictest precaution. I need not enter into details now: suffice it to say that my father suspected it not—no, nor did he even suspect that Henry Crawford had won my heart. I knew that it would be useless to implore his consent: I feared that if he learnt our marriage he would thrust me forth from my home—and as my poor husband had naught beyond his pay, it was impossible to make our marriage public, and for me to go with him as his wife. Oh! would to heaven that I had done so! He wished it: but it was for his sake that I was firm in my refusal. I knew that a wife would be a burthen to him in respect to his slender resources—Yes, it was for his sake that I refused! But tell me, dear Mary," she said, after a brief pause, and with some little abruptness—as if her mind were inwardly excited notwithstanding the outward calm which she maintained,—“tell me, dear Mary, are you not happy in the love of this excellent young gentleman who writes you such beautiful, such manly letters?”

I undisguisedly revealed to Sybilla the exact position in which I was placed by that cruel clause in the late Lord Wilberton's testamentary instructions; and I read to her a copy of the letter which I had sent to Eustace Quentin exactly a month back. She gazed upon me with unfeigned admiration, and in a tone of enthusiasm, exclaimed, "No, Mary—it is impossible that such a noble heart as your's can be doomed to disappointment! Nor will Captain Quentin consent to the step you have proposed! Though you have absolved him from his vows, he will demand the fulfilment of your's!"

"Oh, Miss Trevanion!" I said, "for by that name must I continue to call you, lest if I speak your

real one here, I should inadvertently mention it elsewhere,—“do not you possess a noble heart? and have not you been rendered unhappy? You believe in destiny: wherefore should your's be a sad one, and mine to prove otherwise?”

She made no response, but fell into a profound reverie—while I also became absorbed in the deepest thought.

“Ere now,” she resumed, “my father spoke but little in respect to the promise I gave him five months back, and with which you are acquainted: he had the delicacy to spare my feelings so far. He will remain and pass the day here. I have obtained his consent that I may tarry yet another month within these walls; and then, Mary, must I return home—to accept the suit of Mr. Woodville?”

Miss Trevanion—as I shall still persevere in calling her, instead of Mrs. Crawford—ceased speaking; and I saw that now she had given me the fullest explanations and received mine in return, she wished to quit the unpleasant topic, at least so far as discourse was concerned: but how could she possibly banish it from her thoughts? Indeed, her strength of mind must have been very great, that she was enabled to descend to the parlour and so command her feelings as well as compose her features, that her aunt did not perceive anything unusual had occurred.

Several days passed—and I heard nothing from the Gipsy Queen. I felt naturally anxious relative to the speculation in which my brother Robert was engaged with his friend Mr. Tomlinson: for I sincerely hoped that it would afford him an honourable and competent livelihood. I knew so little of theatrical matters that I began to think they must see their way in undertaking such a venture somewhat more clearly than I saw it for them: but I was constantly asking myself how it was possible they could make the enterprise succeed, when I was well aware that on the day they took the theatre they had not the wherewith to procure a dinner until I supplied the means. On the Tuesday following their first night, I purchased a newspaper, to see what account would be given therein. I was both surprised and gratified to read a flaming description of “Old Drury opening for the performance of the legitimate drama;” and it appeared that Mr. Tomlinson, who was represented as being known “as one of the most able and enterprising of provincial managers,” had succeeded in forming “a corps far from deficient in talent, and which under all circumstances might be pronounced more than respectable.” So ran a portion of the criticism. The plays performed on the opening night were *Macbeth* and a comedy in two acts. Mr. Tomlinson took the character of *Macbeth*, and was described as doing sufficient justice thereto, save and except that he threw rather too much pomposity and stateliness into its conception. He strutted too much as the King, and lost sight of the murderous usurper. The house appeared to have been crowded by an enthusiastic audience—the scenery was pronounced excellent—and the whole seemed to have gone off uncommonly well. But would such prosperity continue? I most sincerely hoped so for my brother's sake—and for his only: as I cared nothing at all for Mr. Tomlinson.

But ere the day wore out, I was destined to have my hopes considerably damped, while at the same

time I obtained a somewhat deeper insight into the theatrical mysteries of the enterprise. Mrs. Summery regularly took in a daily paper; but it was not left at the house till the afternoon-part of the day. It happened that she and Sybilla were out for a walk when this newspaper arrived: it was not the same as the one I had purchased—and I looked to ascertain in what spirit its criticism was penned. I found, to my astonishment, that in nearly all its details it was different from the former. It commenced by deploring that one of the time-honoured national theatres should have fallen into the hands of an individual utterly unknown to the London drama, and with but a very equivocal reputation in the provinces: it sneeringly asked whence the funds were to come to carry out the enterprise, as it was more than suspected that Mr. Tomlinson had commenced with an empty exchequer? It described the company as utterly deficient in talent,—most of the actors and actresses being only second-rate at even the minor theatres. It represented the performance as having been wretched beyond even the scope of thorough ridicule, and depicted Mr. Tomlinson's attempt to impersonate *Macbeth* as so outrageous that if he had sought to enact a comic-serious travestie of the part, he could not have succeeded better. It concluded by acknowledging that the house was full—but declared that the writer of the criticism had positively learnt that the officials connected with the theatre had distributed hundreds of free-admissions amongst the tradesmen of the neighbourhood and in other quarters for the purpose of making a show.

Although so inexperienced in dramatic affairs, I had no difficulty in discerning that this latter criticism must be the correct one; and then I sighed deeply as I thought of my brother. On the following morning I purchased another newspaper, different from both of those I had seen on the preceding day. There I found the proceedings of Drury Lane disposed of in a very few lines, as being almost beneath contempt. Every day that week did I watch the newspapers; and I saw but too plainly that things were getting worse and worse, and that the performers were at length playing to “a beggarly account of empty boxes.” Thus terminated the first week of Mr. Tomlinson's management of Drury Lane. On the ensuing Tuesday morning I found by the journals that the Theatre had remained closed on the preceding evening, the reason being very plainly stated: namely, that on the Saturday night there had not been one single shilling forthcoming to pay the performers. It likewise appeared that there was a terrible disturbance when the bankrupt state of the exchequer was made known—that Mr. Tomlinson was tossed in a blanket by the irate actors, carpenters, scene-shifters, and other male officials—and that the treasurer, Mr. Robert Price, had only escaped the same fate, by means of a precipitate flight. Thus did the enterprise close in disgrace and ignominy; and with a deep despondency of feeling I again asked myself what my brother would do next?

A month passed from the date of the arrival of Captain Quentin's journal; and Sybilla Trevanion was now to leave Sunbeam Villa and return into Essex. Emma, Mrs. Summery's maid, had in the meantime married the well-conducted young man to whom she had been some time engaged: and I

was expected to take her place. Sybilla privately expressed to me the utmost anxiety that I should accompany her: and indeed my own inclination prompted me to do so: but I could not leave the kind-hearted lady who had treated me so well—and Sybilla herself saw the impropriety of urging the point. She insisted upon making me a present of a valuable article of jewellery, which I might keep as a memento of her; and she asked me to give her a book, or anything that I chose, in return. I was much pleased with this delicate behaviour on her part, as well as with the friendly feeling it denoted; and I presented her with one of the handsomest volumes which my little stock comprised. She besought that I would write to her—which I of course promised to do. When the hour of departure came and Mr. Trevanion arrived in his carriage to fetch her away, the poor young lady's courage appeared to fail her. She liked not to quit the villa, which was replete with so many associations that might be described as mournfully interesting to her particular frame of mind; and she disliked to return to the paternal mansion in Essex, where she would have to accept the suit of Mr. Woodville. It was in her own chamber that she took leave of me; and we mingled our tears together. I had learnt to love her as a sister; and it cost me a grievous pang to part from her. She entertained a reciprocal feeling of regard towards myself, and was equally afflicted when the moment of separation came. She pressed me in her arms again and again—giving utterance to the most endearing things—reminding me of my promise to write—and expressing a hope that I should avail myself of some holiday to call upon her in Essex.

We parted: and I sat down in the chamber whence she had just disappeared, a prey to the saddest feelings; for it appeared to me as if I had just lost a valued friend. When I heard the front door open, I went to the window: I saw her go forth, leaning upon her father's arm, and accompanied by her worthy aunt, who went to see her as far as the gate, at which the carriage was in readiness. Twice did Sybilla turn and wave her handkerchief to me, as she saw that I was watching from the window: but I beheld not the departure of the equipage—for my vision was dimmed with tears. Throughout the rest of that day—and indeed for several following ones—Mrs. Summerly herself appeared to be out of spirits, and to miss her niece severely: so that even her pets were somewhat neglected. But in a short time she recovered her wonted cheerfulness—although to me the house continued dull and mournful enough.

This month I did not take my usual holiday. I had not Sarah to call upon; and I was too dispirited and unhappy, for a variety of reasons, to go out for the mere purpose of seeing Mrs. Chaplin. I was looking for another letter from Eustace: but none came. Day after day passed—and still no communication from him. I was not alarmed on his account, because I knew full well that the circumstance was attributable to the irregularity of the arrival of the ships. I was however deeply anxious to hear further particulars relative to the death of Henry Crawford—as well as to receive the assurance that Eustace continued in good health. For although my letter breaking off our engagement, had now been two months on its way to India, yet need

I inform the reader that the welfare of Captain Quentin was as dear to me as ever?

CHAPTER CXXII.

AN EPISODE OF SADNESS.

A MONTH had elapsed since the departure of Sybilla Trevaunion—it was now the end of April—and, as it happened, on the very morning of the day which I was entitled to take for my own recreation, I received a brief note from Barbauld Azetha, requesting me to repair as soon as possible to the house in St. Giles's. Naturally supposing that she had some intelligence to impart relative to Sarah, I lost no time in proceeding thither; and entered the precincts of the Holy Land—as that maze of streets was called—just as the parish clock was proclaiming the hour of eleven in the forenoon. On this occasion I had no difficulty in finding the house; and the moment I knocked at the door, it was opened by the old Norwood Gipsy, Barbauld's mother. She gave me a kind greeting—but appeared to have a mournful look; and methought that she fixed her eyes with compassionate interest upon my countenance. I at once apprehended that the intelligence which was about to be imparted to me, was of a more disagreeable—perhaps even of a more alarming character, than I could have anticipated; and it was with an anxious haste that I questioned the old woman.

"My dear girl," she said, having shut the front door, "you must prepare yourself for something that will afflict you cruelly."

"Speak! for heaven's sake, speak!" I said. "What is it? Sarah—my sister——"

"It regards not her," responded the Norwood Gipsy.

"Not Sarah?" I ejaculated in astonishment, but with increased suspense. "Do tell me!" I exclaimed in feverish, almost frantic excitement: for I saw that the old woman was with the kindest intentions endeavouring to break gradually something for which I was utterly unprepared.

"Your brother Robert," she said, "is—— is—— dying!"

"Dying?" I echoed. "No—do not tell me that! Heavens! so young—and with so much to atone for!—No, no—it is impossible! But where is he?"

The old Gipsy pointed towards the staircase: I rushed up to Barbauld Azetha's own chamber; and there I beheld Robert lying in the bed,—a nurse seated by his side, and the Gipsy Queen standing near. He was pale as a ghost, and evidently in a dying state—but perfectly sensible. Medicines were upon the table; and there was every indication that the kindest care had been bestowed upon him. I burst into tears as he extended his white hand towards me; and taking it, I pressed it to my lips.

"Mary," he murmured in a faint voice, and evidently speaking with great difficulty, "I feel that I am going. I have been a bad brother to you—to dear William—and to my sisters—but you will forgive me?"

"Forgive you, dear Robert!" I said with a wilder and still more passionate outburst of grief. "I



was never angry with you. I have grieved and deplored—but let us say no more of that! Oh, my dear brother!”—and throwing my arms round his neck, I kissed his pale cheeks, upon which the damps of death were already gathering.

“Dear Mary,” he continued, in still more feeble accents than before, “you are a good girl, and will get on in life—and William is a good youth, and will succeed also. Sweet Jane—dear Jane—”

“Oh! she is also an excellent girl,” I murmured, in a voice half suffocated with convulsing sobs.

“Thank heaven that it is so,” he resumed, with unfeigned piety. “But Sarah—when you see her again, dear Mary, tell her that from my death-bed I sent her a solemn warning to amend and repent. Oh! if I had done my duty as a brother, this would not have happened to her: no, no—it would not! But I have been bad—I have been wicked—and as a punishment I am thus cut short in the vigour of

my years. This excellent woman,” he continued, raising his eyes towards the Gipsy Queen, “deserves our most grateful thanks. She will tell you presently how all this happened. Meanwhile, Mary, kneel down and pray—and if I do not join you aloud, I shall accompany you with the inward voice of my soul.”

I did kneel down, recovering strength as well as composure sufficient to pray; and I said what I thought fitting and appropriate. Even as I went on praying, I felt that amidst the bitter affliction of this scene, it was nevertheless a source of sweetest satisfaction that my brother should have been brought to a better state of feeling. When I ceased, he murmured, “Amen:” and as I rose from my knees, a gentleman whom I soon found to be the medical attendant, entered the room. Barbauld hastily whispered to him who I was; and he took my hand, pressing it in silence—but with that pec-

liar significance of clasp, as well as accompanying look, which made me aware that there was no earthly hope for my brother. Then the doctor, who was an old and benevolent man, approached the bed—felt his patient's pulse—and bending over him, said a few soothing words, not in his medical character, but in a friendly and religious spirit.

"God is good to me at the last," murmured Robert; "for I experience no pain. Come, Mary—give me your hand—let me hold it—while—while—life is ebbing away—God bless you, dearest Mary—God bless you—my—sweet—sister!"

I was blinded by my tears; and did not for some moments perceive that he had ceased to breathe almost immediately after he had given utterance to the last benediction. His spirit had flitted away, unaccompanied by any physical struggle—without even a spasm, a convulsion, a gasp, or a moan. I did not know it until I felt the hand which I retained in my own, was growing cold, and that it no longer held to mine with the clasp of vitality. Then I wiped away my tears—threw a glance upon my brother's countenance—and saw that he was no more. I bent over him—pressed my lips to his forehead—and turned aside to give free vent to the tears that now flowed afresh. As I remembered the sorrowful and self-accusing words that he had uttered in respect to Sarah, I experienced a feeling bordering upon frenzy: for there was something harrowing to a degree in the reflection, that in his last moments he should have been tortured by the sense of neglect towards that lost sister. A giddiness seized upon me—I staggered and should have fallen, had not the Gipsy Queen caught me in her arms,—when all consciousness abandoned me.

My recovery from the swoon was very slow—very gradual—and accompanied by circumstances of a painful and mysterious nature. The first scintillation of returning consciousness appeared to make me aware that I was lying back in a large arm-chair, my head resting against a pillow placed behind me. There was an odour of vinegar floating around, and of some powerful essence applied to my nostrils. One of my hands was retained in a soft and friendly pressure by the Gipsy Queen, whom I beheld standing by my side; but her shape seemed dim and indistinct—and I recognized it rather from an intuitive knowledge of who my kind ministratrix must be, than from the positive exercise of the power of vision. Methought that I was in a dream, from which I was too lethargic to arouse myself completely.

"She is recovering," I heard a whispering voice say: and I knew it to be that of Barbauld Azetha.

"Then away with you, away!" said another voice, likewise in low accents, though it spoke imperiously and excitedly; and I knew it to be that of the old Norwood Gipsy.

"One moment more—only one moment! Alas, poor Robert!"—and these words were spoken by a *third voice*,—the voice of a man speaking in low, murmuring, tremulous tones—but a voice which methought that I also recognised: and then I gave a gasp in a desperate endeavour to start up from that half-dreamy half-lethargic state in which my senses were retained.

"Away, away!" said the old Norwood Gipsy again; and the sounds of footsteps hurrying to the

door, reached my ears. I opened my eyes again—for they had closed a moment back—closed involuntarily on my part: and as the door opened, methought that I caught a glimpse of the disappearing form of a man—a glimpse too of his countenance, as he threw a look at me: and that countenance was my own father's! I screamed out, and sprang straight up from my chair: the door closed—I fell back again, as if stricken by a thunder-bolt—and remembered no more, until coming to my senses a second time, I found myself still half-reclining in that chair, with the Gipsy Queen on one side, her mother on the other, and the nurse bustling about the room, all ministering to my recovery.

I have thus endeavoured to describe as faithfully and as minutely as possible, what took place upon that occasion—exactly all I saw, all I fancied, and all I felt. This time my return to consciousness was rapid; and in a few minutes it was complete. I appeared to be awakened from a vision, to behold a dread reality before me: for there, upon the bed, lay stretched the corpse of my brother. The doctor had gone. I remembered indeed that he had left the room immediately after the demise, and ere I had first fainted. A dreadful excitement of the feelings now supervened. All that I had beheld and heard rushed back to my memory. I pressed my hands to my brows to steady my thoughts, and enable myself to understand clearly whether I had been dreaming—or whether there had indeed been a waking interval in the midst of my swoon, during which I had heard those hurried whispers and had beheld that retreating form. Yes—I felt assured it was no vision!

"Barbauld," I said, rising up from the chair, and looking her full in the face—for all sense of physical weakness had passed away in the excitement of my feelings,—*"I adjure you by everything sacred, to tell me what has happened!"*

"You have been in a swoon, dear Mary," she answered, meeting my gaze with a steadiness that bewildered me: "yes—you have been in a swoon for the last twenty minutes. Unfortunately the doctor was compelled to hurry away, to attend another dying patient, immediately after your own poor brother's heart had ceased to beat; and thus we were deprived of his services when you fainted. We have had much difficulty in recovering you—"

"Barbauld," I said, subduing an almost frantic excitement through a sudden sense of solemn awe on account of my dead brother who lay in the couch, "I must speak to you immediately in some other room." Having thus spoken, I advanced to the bed—imprinted another kiss upon Robert's marble forehead—and followed the Gipsy Queen to an apartment on the ground floor, to which she conducted me.

"Now, dear Mary," she said, "pray do not excite yourself. Everything has been done that *could* be done on earth for your deceased brother. He told you so with his own lips."

"I know it, I know it," I responded, tears streaming down my cheeks in grief for his loss: and for a few minutes I was unable to put the questions which I so much longed to ask. At length, wiping away my tears, and regaining a certain degree of composure, I said, "Barbauld, again I adjure you to tell me truly of the things I am about to speak—"

In the midst of my swoon some one entered the chamber of death. I heard yourself and your mother speak in whispers—I heard *him* speak also—I saw him flee from the chamber—I caught a glimpse of his countenance—I beheld the look he cast upon me—it was full of sadness, mingled with some other feeling which was to me inexplicable. Yes—I heard and saw all this: and that countenance—it was either that of him whom I once before beheld here, or else of my father! Or perhaps they are one and the same! Barbauld, I beseech—I conjure you—deceive me not—tell me the truth!”

“Mary,” she replied, with a look and voice of such solemn earnestness that I was again bewildered and confounded, “you have been dreaming—your imagination was fevered—your fancy was in disorder. Do not give way to these hallucinations.”

“Then, Barbauld,” said I, scarcely knowing what to think, “I will put another question to you. If it were not really my father, did not he whom you call Graham enter the chamber of death?”

“No, Mary:”—and Barbauld Azetha still met my earnest regard steadily and unflinchingly. “Again I assure you that you were dreaming. My mother and the nurse will tell you precisely the same thing.”

I was about to adjure her still more solemnly and sacredly to answer my questions: I was about likewise to shape them in another form: but methought it was useless. If she were resolved not to answer them, she would adhere to her determination: if there were some tremendous mystery to be maintained for reasons which I could not penetrate, she would maintain it. And more—if there were any imperious necessity in practising this deceit towards me, it would only be painful to her to have to reiterate those denials, and ungenerous of me to subject her to such pain after the kind and tender treatment which she had evidently shown towards my deceased brother. Nor less did I feel that there would be something indelicate in giving way to any undue excitement within the same hour that he had breathed his last. For all these considerations I held my peace upon the topic. But not the less firmly did the conviction exist in my own mind, that what I had heard and seen was a reality, and not the result of a fevered fancy in a dreamy state.

Barbauld Azetha now proceeded to give me the sad details connected with Robert's last illness. She said, “Four evenings back, as my mother and myself, having arrived from Norwood between nine and ten o'clock, were threading our way through the streets of the Holy Land, towards this house, we were attracted by an evident sensation and confusion prevailing in a public-house, the doors of which stood wide open. ‘Let him have air!’ cried a voice. —‘Run for a doctor!’ said another.—‘He is tipsy!’ ejaculated a third.—‘No, it is a fit!’ said a fourth. There was a great crowd inside: it parted—and four or five persons appeared, carrying forth a young man in a state of unconsciousness. A tall stout individual, who was exceedingly intoxicated, but with a great deal of theatrical pomposity in his manner, was directing the proceedings. There are few of the gipsy race, Mary, who do not understand something of the medical craft; and I advanced to see whether I could render any assistance. I immediately became interested in the young man—I

scarcely knew why: and yet methought at the moment that his countenance was not altogether unfamiliar to me. But there was little leisure then for reflection. The young man was evidently in an alarming condition; and I saw that he had not only been drinking freely, but was likewise in a dangerous fit. I at once declared that it was necessary he should be put to bed and a surgeon sent for. The mistress of the public-house—a coarse, brutal, selfish woman—vowed and protested that she would not have any one die beneath her roof, as it would drive all her customers away while the corpse remained there. I thereupon asked the stout individual where the young man lived: but all the answer I could get was, ‘At a very great distance’ and thereupon he walked away in a tipsy kind of indifference. My mother and myself decided in a moment how to act. It happened that three or four of our own people were at the public-house at the time; so we had the young man conveyed hither, while one ran down into High Street for a doctor. The invalid was at once put to bed up-stairs: the doctor came—and corroborated the opinions we had already formed. The young man,” continued the Gipsy Queen, speaking slowly and hesitatingly, with a most delicate regard for my feelings,—“had been drinking to excess: it had terminated in a fit—and there was every reason to fear congestion of the brain. We searched the invalid's pockets to discover, if possible, who he was: but no card nor paper afforded the slightest indication. I regret to add that he was poorly, even shabbily dressed—and that his apparel denoted indigent circumstances. Everything was done for him that the medical man ordered, or that the danger of his position suggested. A nurse was hired to attend upon him—or rather to assist in such attention: for my mother and I took our turns to remain with him from the very first moment he was brought to the house. He remained in a state of unconsciousness until six o'clock this morning; and then he rallied with a singular rapidity. The medical man was immediately sent for: but before he came the unfortunate invalid vomited a quantity of blood. This symptom was most alarming: and yet for the time it appeared to afford considerable relief. I must here observe that during the whole time the young man lay ill until that moment of his rallying, I had often and often contemplated his countenance as he lay in apathetic slumber,—so convinced was I that I had seen it before, and that it was not altogether strange to me. When he came to his senses this morning, and after a little while was enabled to speak, he told me who he was. Then was I surprised that I had not at once discovered the family resemblance between yourself and him. But it was a likeness—and yet not a likeness: it was a likeness that one would only identify when informed of it—and not one that would strike all in a moment upon the conviction. But I need say no more on this subject. The instant I learnt who he was, I despatched a messenger with a note to you, Mary, at Sunbeam Villa; and if I worded it so laconically and ambiguously, it was to save your feelings as much torture as possible.”

I took the Gipsy Queen's hand and pressed it to my lips. I had been weeping throughout her narrative; and my tears now rained down upon that hand. I endeavoured to renew my expressions of heartfelt thanks for all the generous kindness she

had shown to my poor brother: but my voice was choked with suffocating sobs—it was lost in the poignant anguish that I experienced. I could not then bring myself to reflect that it was perhaps a happy release for a young man who had shown so little disposition to work out any good for himself in this world, and the future of whose existence, had he lived on, might have proved deplorable indeed. No: I thought only that he was gone—that he lay dead in the chamber above me—that I had lost a brother!

"Perhaps, dear Mary," resumed Barbauld Azetha, "it would be a source of solace to you to be assured that during the interval which elapsed between his recovery of consciousness and your arrival, the poor young man expressed his contrition for his past errors, and his appreciation of all your excellent qualities. He besought me to tell you, should the breath of life leave him ere you came, that in his supreme moments he had awakened to a sense of his guilty career—that he looked back upon it with loathing and horror—and that amongst his saddest reflections, was the thought that he had on many occasions behaved most cruelly to you. In a word, Mary, he declared that you were everything a kind and excellent sister ought to be—whereas he had proved the worst of brothers. But I will say no more: you are already too deeply distressed. This however I may add—that he expressed his satisfaction that Mr. Tomlinson, as he represented that tall stout individual to be, had not come to see him during his illness: for he now entertained a detestation for that man who had been the cause of leading him into many errors."

I will not linger any more upon this scene. When the violence of my anguish had subsided, I spoke to Barbauld concerning the requisite preparations for the funeral. She at once said, in terms of mingled kindness and delicacy, that she knew I should not like the obsequies to take place from that house in the heart of St. Giles—and she besought me to leave everything in her hands, as she would superintend the arrangements in a manner that would give me satisfaction under such mournful circumstances. She besought me to return to Mrs. Summerly's; and if I thought fit to see the remains of my brother once more ere he was consigned to the grave, she would write and let me know when she considered it expedient for me to come. I followed her advice. Again I thanked her for her kindness and generous consideration; and with deep sadness in my heart, I quitted the house of death. On reaching Sunbeam Villa, I frankly explained to Mrs. Summerly everything that had occurred, and received from her the tenderest sympathy. She questioned me minutely as to the exact situation of the house in St. Giles's—and then bade me go up to my chamber and write by that day's post to my brother William,—adding that if he came up to London to attend the funeral, he was most welcome to stay at the villa. She gently and delicately bade me have no concern about the expenses attending Robert's death and interment; and when I expressed my fervid gratitude for her goodness, I beheld tears trickling down the old lady's cheeks.

On gaining my own room, I sat down and wrote a letter to William; and by the time it was finished, a milliner was introduced to make me mourning

apparel, in pursuance of instructions which she had received from Mrs. Summerly.

Late in the evening of the following day William made his appearance at the villa. It was a mournful meeting—and he wept much when I related to him the circumstances of our brother's death. That same night, ere retiring to rest, a tailor came to measure William for his black clothes; and all this was done by Mrs. Summerly's directions. At an early hour on the ensuing morning, I received a note from Barbauld, requesting me to proceed to a certain house, the address of which she gave. It was in Oxford Street; and thither had Robert's remains been removed. William and I accordingly repaired to that house together, and found it to be an undertaker's. We were shown up into a well furnished chamber, where a coffin was standing upon tressels. The Gipsy Queen, dressed as a respectable woman of the middle class, speedily joined us, in company with the undertaker himself. The lid of the coffin was removed—and I gazed again upon the marble features of my dead brother. William was profoundly affected—so much so, that it was even with difficulty we could get him away from the room. Some years had elapsed since he had seen Robert: and now that he beheld him for the last time, it was as a corpse!

Barbauld Azetha presently drew me aside, and said, "You possess an excellent and kind-hearted mistress, dear Mary. The day before yesterday, two or three hours after you had left the house in St. Giles's, her footman—a benevolent man—called there and asked for me. He told me that he was instructed by Mrs. Summerly to liquidate the expenses already incurred, and provide the funds for the funeral. I declared that I had promised myself the mournful satisfaction of discharging them all, as a slight tribute of my friendship for you: but he would not hear of it. He therefore paid the nurse handsomely, and sent a liberal remuneration to the medical man. He offered me an equally munificent recompense: but I need not tell you that I positively declined to receive it. In the interval I had made arrangements with the undertaker here; and on learning his address, Mr. Goldworthy—for such he told me was his name—came and placed in the funeral-furnisher's hands the amount necessary for all the costs of the burial. The interment will take place, Mary, three days hence, in St. Giles's church-yard."

Ah, excellent-hearted Mrs. Summerly! what kindness was I now experiencing at her hands. And it was for this that she had so particularly inquired the situation of the gipsy's house in St. Giles's. Barbauld too—she had proved herself a true friend throughout this trying ordeal; and she now received my own renewed thanks, coupled with those of my brother William. Three days afterwards the funeral took place,—William, myself, and the medical man following Robert's remains to the grave.

William remained a few days longer at Sunbeam Villa, according to the express wish of Mrs. Summerly, who considerably thought that I should derive satisfaction from his company until our mutual grief experienced some mitigation. I need hardly say that it was a source of comfort to me to reflect that if I had lost one brother, I still possessed another, and this one of most excellent cha-

raeter and virtuous disposition. He assured me that he continued more than ever satisfied with his situation at Mr. Sands'—and gave me the pleasing intelligence that through the kindness of that gentleman, aided also by the bounty of Squire Kingston, who was much interested in him, both on his own account and mine, he was shortly to be afforded the opportunity of studying for the medical profession. It appeared that poor Jane was profoundly afflicted when she had been informed by William of Robert's death; and I wrote her a letter full of the most soothing endearments. We talked likewise of Sarah: and we mingled our tears as we contemplated her fall and shudderingly thought of the future in respect to her!

CHAPTER CXXIII.

TREVANION HALL.

WILLIAM had taken his departure, bearing away with him several handsome gifts from the kind-hearted Mrs. Summerly; and time wore on. I heard nothing from Barbauld relative to Sarah, and therefore concluded that the unfortunate girl had quitted London with Captain Tollemache. It was now the end of May; and three months had elapsed since the receipt of Captain Quentin's journal. During this interval no farther correspondence had arrived; and I had grown excessively uneasy on Eustace's account. I had received several letters from Miss Trevanion, one of which was in answer to a note I had penned telling her of my brother's death; and in this reply she expressed the kindest sympathy. All her correspondence was tinged with a deep melancholy,—yet a melancholy mingled with a resignation to what she believed to be her destiny. I was informed, from these letters, that she had accepted the suit of Mr. Woodville—and it was with the utmost difficulty she had procured from her father a delay of a few months ere the day for the marriage was to be fixed. She said that she often deliberated in her own mind whether she ought not, in honour and delicacy, to inform Mr. Woodville candidly that she had been married—that she was a widow—and that therefore, as but a few months had elapsed since Mr. Crawford's death, she ought to be allowed the usual term of mourning previous to contracting a new alliance. But with the superstitious feelings that were natural to her, she regarded that marriage of her's as a holy and solemn secret, only to be breathed in the ear of one who could appreciate and comprehend the illimitable love she had experienced for Mr. Crawford. Moreover, apart from these romantic and deeply sentimental considerations, she trembled at the idea of revealing that marriage to her father—a revelation she would be compelled to make, if she decided upon confessing it to Mr. Woodville: and thus was the unhappy young lady uncertain and bewildered how to act.

It was at the close of May that I received from Sybilla the following letter:—

"Trevanion Hall, Essex.
"May 30th, 1832.

"Dearest Mary

"Amidst feelings of unspeakable anguish, do I pen you these few lines. It is now four o'clock in the after-

noon; and I have just experienced a sad and terrible scene with my father. It appears that at an early hour this morning his principal creditor arrived, accompanied by bailiffs, to make a seizure of the property. My father besought the creditor to accompany him to Mr. Woodville's, and to spare him the disgrace of making the seizure until the result of the interview with that gentleman should transpire. This was agreed to. Mr. Woodville consented to advance the money—no less than thirty thousand pounds—on condition that in three days I should accompany him to the altar. It was thereupon arranged between my father and Mr. Woodville that the bridal should take place on the morning of the 3rd of June—on which condition Mr. Woodville at once agreed to write an instruction to his London banker to pay the creditor the above mentioned sum the moment he (the banker) received the intimation that the marriage ceremony had taken place. At three o'clock this afternoon my father broke to me what had been done. Oh, Mary! conceive the anguish which I then endured. All my fortune abandoned me. I had made up my mind to a self-sacrifice, as you know: but I had been promised a reprieve of several months. It is now but eight months since the death of my beloved and never-to-be-forgotten Henry; and it seemed to me a desecration of the solemn ties that had bound me to him thus speedily to contract another alliance. I fell at my father's feet, and told him everything. For a moment he was confounded: but quickly recovering his presence of mind, he said, '*Sybilla, if you recollect the circumstance of your former marriage to Mr. Woodville, all will be over—all will be lost—my ruin will ensue: and then my withering curse shall alight on your head!*' Oh, what fearful words! The scene that ensued was both agonizing and terrible: it was a repetition of much that had occurred on the banks of the canal many months ago—but more agonizing, more terrible! I cannot dwell thereon. There is madness in my brain, even as I pen this letter. For, Oh! I have consented to do my father's bidding in all things—Yes: I have consented—I was compelled to do so!

"I can write no more. I scarcely know what I have written; and I dare not re-read it. At ten o'clock, on the 3rd of June, Mary, say to yourself that a tremendous sacrifice—the sacrifice of self-martyrdom, is to be accomplished!

"Your afflicted and almost heart-broken friend,
"SYBILLA."

Unfortunate young lady! she did indeed possess my deepest sympathy. But I had not much leisure to reflect upon the contents of this letter: for scarcely had I read it, when I was summoned to the parlour to speak to my mistress. When I entered, I perceived that she held an open letter in her hand, and that its contents had produced so strange and bewildering an effect upon her, that even her pets were all vainly seeking to be noticed and fondled as usual.

"Mary," she said, "here is a strange thing! Miss Trevanion is going to be married. This letter is from her father. The wedding is to take place on the third of next month. Why, it's only three or four days, I declare! How strange that I should not have been informed of it before! I can't understand it. And Sybilla too—who has written me several letters since she left us, and has never mentioned even that such an engagement had taken place! My brother-in-law assures me that it is an excellent match: for Mr. Woodville—that's the name of Sybilla's intended—is enormously rich: and though he is some few years older than Sybilla, he will make her an excellent husband. Well; I hope so—as she is a dear good girl, and I am very fond of her. I am invited to be present at the wedding, and shall of course go. I shall leave on the 2nd of

June. Now, what I wanted to say to you is this—that if after your recent loss, and being in mourning too, you would rather not accompany me to a scene of wedding festivities, you have only to say the word, and you shall remain at the villa. I thought I had better speak to you at once about it—so that you will quickly make up your mind, and I shall know how to act.”

It struck me at the instant when Mrs. Summerly left the alternatives in my own hands, that perhaps poor Sybilla would be glad to have me with her at a time when she would so much need the consolations of one whom she had made a confidante and whom she regarded as a sincere friend. I would certainly have rather remained at the villa on purely personal considerations: but it occurred to me that it was almost a duty which I owed the unhappy young lady to be near her at the trying period through which she was about to pass. I therefore informed Mrs. Summerly that I would accompany her.

The next day came, and passed: still no communication from Eustace. Another day dawned, and closed: still no letter. Yet I perceived by the newspaper of this day (June 1st) that a ship from Madras had just arrived in the Downs. Oh! perhaps the morrow's post would bring me a communication: but I was disappointed. My uneasiness was excessive. Although I had myself broken off the engagement, yet I was as fondly interested as ever in Captain Quentin's welfare; and the anguish I experienced at this silence on his part, was becoming intolerable. Had anything happened to him? was he no more? had death seized upon the handsome, the gallant, and the good? Alas, I was tortured with the wildest apprehensions! I knew that if he were alive he would have written: his last communication had promised that another one should speedily follow. Yet three months had now elapsed, and nothing had arrived. Could his letters have miscarried? could they have been intercepted? Oh! I clung to this hope: for it was the only one which left the possibility of belief that he was alive.

At about three o'clock on the 2nd of June, a post-chaise drove up to the door of Sunbeam Villa to convey Mrs. Summerly and myself to Trevanion Hall, Essex. But a dress-maker, who had faithfully promised to have ready in full time the apparel which my mistress intended to wear at the wedding, had not yet made her appearance. What was to be done? Mrs. Summerly, as I have said in an earlier chapter, dressed gaily, though in good taste; and she attached much importance to her toilet. I now beheld her really angry for the first time that I had been in her service. I volunteered to hurry off to the dress-maker, who lived at no great distance, and ascertain exactly in what state of forwardness the dress might be. Thither I accordingly sped, and found that the milliner had at least a dozen hours' work to do, although she at first endeavoured to persuade me that half the time would complete the dress. I hastened back to the villa; and Mrs. Summerly made up her mind how to act.

“The dress I must have,” she said: “I have none other fit to appear in. Run back, Mary, like a good girl, and tell her that if she will faithfully promise to send the dress home by at least seven o'clock tomorrow morning, it will do: but she must not disappoint me on any account—or else I will never

employ her again. Goldworthy”—alluding to the footman—“shall bring it down into Essex the moment it arrives: the distance is only a dozen miles—and there will be plenty of time, if the milliner herself keeps her promise.”

I accordingly returned to the woman, who vowed and protested that Mrs. Summerly should not be disappointed. We then entered the post-chaise, which immediately drove away. In about an hour and a half we reached Trevanion Hall, which was a fine old country mansion, beautifully situated in the midst of spacious grounds. The river flowed at a little distance in front; and I observed that it was quite near enough for the drowning cry of mortal agony to reach the ears of an inmate of the dwelling during the stillness of the night. But, wherefore, if the apparition of Henry Crawford was a reality, should not that of the servant Sophia have been equally real?

Mr. and Miss Trevanion came forth to welcome Mrs. Summerly, as the post-chaise drove up to the front of the house; and when Sybilla had embraced her aunt, she folded me in her arms with an equal degree of affection—to the evident surprise of her father and the assembled domestics, who were doubtless at a loss to conceive wherefore a humble servant-maid should thus be treated by the young lady as an equal. She conducted Mrs. Summerly up to the bed-chamber prepared for her reception; and when I had assisted to take off my mistress's things, I hastened to unpack the box, that she might dress for dinner. All the time I was thus engaged, Mrs. Summerly said little about the marriage to her niece; and they talked on indifferent topics. But Sybilla frequently addressed a kind observation to me, and gave me fully to understand that it was a solace to her to have me at the Hall at that trying and momentous period. When Mrs. Summerly's toilet was performed, Sybilla conducted her down to the drawing-room, where some guests were assembled. A female servant then came to show me my own chamber, which was exactly opposite Mrs. Summerly's, and almost as good. A spacious dressing-room opened thence, and was fitted so as to serve if needful as a little parlour.

“Miss Trevanion,” said the domestic, “has given orders that I am to serve you your repasts here—as she conceives that on account of a recent loss you have sustained, you would rather be alone than come down to the servants' hall. I hope you will find yourself comfortable; and it will give me great pleasure to attend to all your wishes.”

I thanked her for her civility, and deeply appreciated the considerate delicacy of Sybilla's conduct towards me. She did not choose me to be treated as a menial beneath that roof, and was thus giving me to understand as far as she could consistently with circumstances, that she regarded me in the light of a friend. The servant informed me that there were three or four other guests besides Mrs. Summerly at the Hall, but that the bridal would be comparatively a private one, according to Miss Trevanion's special request. She asked me if I would have dinner brought up: but I told her I dined at the usual hour before I left Sunbeam Villa, and that I would presently take some tea. She offered to show me the grounds; and as I felt restless, uneasy, and anxious, for several reasons—

and disliked the idea of remaining alone in my chamber for a number of hours—I accepted the proposal. It was now about half-past five in the evening; and the weather was exceedingly beautiful. I therefore thought that a little ramble would do me good, and perhaps cheer my spirits as much as it was possible for them to be elevated under all circumstances.

We descended the stairs; and as we passed through the hall, I saw an elderly gentleman, rather lame, and with an ungainly stoop, cross from one room to another. He was dressed in evening costume—with an immense projecting shirt-frill, a white waistcoat, silk stockings, and shoes; and he had a white rose or camelia—I could not exactly distinguish which—in his button-hole. He was what might be termed a very ugly man: he had a repulsive and sinister look—there were hard lines upon his forehead—and his compressed lips showed a mind capable of the sternest resolution. Methought his aspect even denoted a heartless implacability. The moment he had disappeared from my view, the female servant who was accompanying me, said in a whisper, “That is Mr. Woodville!” I had already suspected it; and I now experienced, if possible, a greater repugnance than ever to the idea that such a beautiful creature as Sybilla should be sacrificed to such a man.

“Do you find my young mistress at all altered?” asked the servant-maid, as we walked together in the back garden.

“Yes,” I replied: “she is thinner—and very pale.”

“And she looks careworn too,” added my companion. “Poor creature! she endeavours to conceal all she experiences, but she cannot—it is too painfully visible. I can assure you,” continued the young woman, with much emotion, “that we all sympathize with her deeply.”

I did not choose to encourage a conversation respecting Sybilla, the circumstances of whose position were so much better known to me than to any one else—her father alone excepted; and I began discoursing on other topics. We walked for about an hour—and then re-entered the house. I ascended to my own room—had my tea—and then, being left alone, endeavoured to while away the time and occupy my thoughts with a book that I had brought with me. Presently the door opened—and Sybilla made her appearance.

“I have stolen away from the company, dear Mary,” she said, again embracing me affectionately, “to have a few minutes’ conversation with you: because I do not know that I shall be enabled to see you again previous to to-morrow’s ceremony, which will be so soon followed by my departure from this house!”

She spoke in a voice of deepest mournfulness: but she shed no tears. Her’s was a sorrow too closely bordering upon despair to find for itself a vent in weeping. There was moreover upon her countenance that same rigid expression of strong resolve which I had sometimes noticed at Sunbeam Villa—a resolve to accept her destiny with as much resignation as possible!

“It is very kind of you to have accompanied my aunt hither,” she went on to say; “for I am sure that you must have grief enough of your own.”—and she glanced compassionately at my

mourning dress. “But tell me,” she asked—and now her voice sank to an almost hushed whisper—“have you heard again from Madras?”

“No, dear Miss Trevanion,” I replied; “and I am deeply uneasy on account of this silence on Captain Quentin’s part—or perhaps I should say, this non-arrival of whatsoever letters he may have written.”

“Then you have heard no more,” resumed Sybilla, “concerning that fatal event?”—and it was with a visible shudder that she thus alluded to Henry Crawford’s death.

“Not another syllable—not another word,” I rejoined. “I have occasionally seen the newspapers; but I have not encountered a single line giving any farther particulars thereon.”

“Then I am acquainted with more than yourself,” remarked Sybilla: “at least I have heard some few additional particulars. A little time back my father called at the India House in Leadenhall Street, to make inquiries concerning poor Henry’s death: for he thought that perhaps I might wish for some farther confirmation of the dread intelligence. When he returned from London, he informed me that he had seen an official at the India House, who had placed before him a letter recently received, and giving full particulars concerning the lamentable event. It appears that poor Henry was warned by some natives not to bathe on that particular morning, as the surf was running so high: but he neglected the well-meant counsel. A huge wave carried him out to a considerable distance; and it is supposed that he must have been seized with a sudden cramp—for he was too courageous to have been overpowered by mere dismay. He perished before succour could reach him: he was buried with military honours—and a stone marks his resting-place in the cemetery at Madras. Such were the particulars my father gleaned at the India House, and which he recited to me.”

At this moment the female servant entered, saying, “If you please, Miss, Mr. Trevanion is inquiring for you in the drawing-room.”

“I come directly,” she cried: then, as soon as the domestic had left the room, Sybilla, throwing her arms round my neck, said, “Mary, if I do not have an opportunity of speaking to you again, let me avail myself of this moment to give you the assurance of my lasting friendship. And I have a favour to ask of you, dear Mary. It is this, that if my aunt will consent to part with you, you will in a short time come and take up your abode with me. I shall have need of such a friend as you. But think not it is as a dependant I thus wish to have you with me: it is as a friend—as a companion—an equal. I do not think that when once Mr. Woodville has forced me to accompany him to the altar, he will play the tyrant towards me, or in any way thwart my wishes. Therefore I shall be so far mistress of my own proceedings as to be enabled to have you to reside permanently with me. Now, dear Mary, will you promise me this, provided Mrs. Summerly will cheerfully consent?”

“I am under the deepest obligations to your excellent aunt, dear Miss Trevanion,” I answered; “and would not for the world act unhandsonly or ungenerously towards her. At the same time, I need not say that if it would be a source of conso-

lation to yourself that I should come to you, and that Mrs. Summerly being led to view it in that same light, gave her consent——”

“It is thus that I understand it—it is thus that I shall arrange it,” interrupted Sybilla. “And now one more embrace, dear Mary—for my father is evidently impatient, even at this brief absence. Do you know,” she added, in a scarcely audible whisper, “that I firmly believe he fears lest I should fly from the house to avoid the dread ceremony of to-morrow?”

Sybilla waited not for any answer I might give; but having clasped me in her arms, hurried from the chamber. I endeavoured to resume the perusal of my book; but I found my thoughts constantly wandering into other channels—and these of no pleasurable description. Indeed, amongst all my reflections, there was not one to cheer me: all were gloomy and dispiriting. I was very, very unhappy. Slowly and languidly the time passed away; and soon after ten o'clock, a supper tray was brought up to my room. But I required no refreshment: my appetite was gone. I was however tortured with a feverish thirst; and though I drank copiously of water, it would not be assuaged. At about eleven o'clock I was summoned to Mrs. Summerly's apartment to attend her night-toilet; and in the course of conversation, she expressed a hope that the milliner would not disappoint her in respect to her dress in the morning. She then went on to say, “Sybilla is very fond of you, Mary: indeed, I know that she has the greatest regard for you. She often was wont to speak to me, when at the villa, in the highest terms: but just now, when we were for a few minutes alone together, she talked of you as if of a sister. Poor Sybilla! I hope she will be happy: but——”

And Mrs. Summerly stopped short: for she was the last person in the world to travel out of her way to throw a damp upon anything, or to conjure up evils without the best possible ground. But yet I saw that she *did* entertain certain misgivings in the present instance; and at the bottom of her mind there was a lurking dissatisfaction to the match which her niece was about to contract.

“Well, I *must* speak out,” she said, with an unusual abruptness and petulance: “for it is no use to endeavour to stifle what is in my thoughts. I confess, Mary, that I am surprised at this marriage. I never saw Mr. Woodville before; and it would be perfectly ridiculous to pretend that it can be an affair of the heart on Sybilla's side. No, no—it is impossible. Then, what can it be? I must tell you that a little time back I did hear it whispered that Mr. Trevanion was in pecuniary difficulties. I hope to heaven that this is no alliance to patch them up! I asked Sybilla very seriously just now if she was happy; and though she answered *yes*, yet I did not think that she spoke with that sincerity which is natural to her noble spirit. However, it is not for me to interfere: I have not been consulted in the matter; but my sincere hope is that it will all end happily. And now good night, Mary.”

I lingered for a moment: I had it upon the tip of my tongue to tell the worthy aunt how shamefully her niece was about to be sacrificed: the first words of an indignant and appealing sentence were even about to quit my lips,—when I reflected that the secret was not mine—that I had no right to

betray it—and that if Sybilla had studied to lull her aunt into tranquillity on her account, it would be a most unpardonable and unjustifiable breach of confidence on my part to reveal what I knew. Mrs. Summerly herself saw that I hesitated, and that I did not immediately leave the room: she even threw upon me an anxious look of inquiry, as if she thought I had something I wished to say, yet dared not speak out: but fearful of being questioned, I bade her good night and hurried away. Entering my own chamber, I retired to rest—but slept little that night; and the slumber I did obtain, was haunted by unpleasant dreams.

I awoke at six o'clock in the morning: the sun was shining brightly—the happy birds were carolling amongst the trees in the back garden, on which my window looked—and nature appeared joyous and gay. When I had dressed myself, it was still too early to repair to Mrs. Summerly's room: for I had been instructed to call her at about half-past seven o'clock. I descended into the garden, where I walked until that time; and then I repaired to her apartment. Almost her first question was, whether Goldworthy had arrived with the dress?—and when I responded in the negative, she expressed a fear that the milliner would disappoint her after all. This I did not however think probable, considering the positive manner in which the woman had pledged herself to me; and I represented that there was still plenty of time, inasmuch as the wedding-party was not to be at the church until ten o'clock, and that therefore she need not think of dressing before nine. When her morning toilet was performed, the worthy old lady descended to the breakfast-parlour; and I returned to my own room. Nine o'clock came—and still Goldworthy made not his appearance. I returned to my mistress's chamber: she had just ascended again—and was really vexed; but she did not literally display any bad temper.

“Well, never mind, Mary,” she said, “we must make the best of it; and I must put on the dress which you yourself recommended as a substitute in case the new one should not arrive.”

But scarcely were these words spoken, when a female servant made her appearance, carrying a bandbox, which we at once felt assured contained the expected dress.

“If you please, ma'am,” said the servant, “your footman has this moment arrived in a gig from London. He desired me to tell you that the milliner never delivered the dress till seven o'clock this morning: and then he started off at once with it.”

“Well, better late than never,” exclaimed Mrs. Summerly: “and there's just time. Bustle about, Mary—there's a dear girl.”

“The footman,” added the servant-maid, turning towards me, “has brought some letters which were delivered last night at Sunbeam Villa; and I have placed them in your room.”

Letters for me? Oh, how I longed to rush away from Mrs. Summerly's chamber, if it were only to fling a single glance at those letters, and ascertain whose hand-writing appeared upon the outside! But I was compelled to curb my curiosity, although it was torturingly poignant. Had I said but a single word, my kind-hearted mistress would have at once permitted me to hasten and relieve myself



from suspense: but she was in a hurry—time was speeding on—she had but just leisure to dress ere the carriages would be at the door to bear the wedding-party to church: and who could possibly keep a wedding-party waiting? So I resigned myself to the necessity of attending on Mrs. Summerly throughout her toilet, which lasted three-quarters of an hour. Three mortal hours did they seem to me! Never was suspense more excruciating: never were blending hopes and fears so fraught with indescribable anguish. Mrs. Summerly saw that I was excited and agitated; and she fancied that it was on her own account, for fear lest she should not be in time. So she endeavoured to hurry herself; and what with her hurrying and my hurrying, the old proverb was verified which says, “The more haste the less speed.” At length the toilet was ended—the last glance was taken at the mirror—and Mrs. Summerly, radiant in a new dress, was perfectly contented with her appearance.

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“Now, Mary,” she said, “just bring me my parasol and my reticule; and then you can go to your room and read the letters—which, by the bye, I dare say you are anxious enough to see. I am sorry, my dear girl, to have kept you away from them so long: in fact, I had altogether forgotten them until this moment.”

She quitted the chamber: I followed her with the articles she needed; and when we reached the drawing-room door, which happened to be standing open at the moment, she took them from me with a good-natured sign that I might now attend to my own affairs. I heard a domestic, who had just entered that room, announce to Mr. Trevanion that the carriages were in readiness; and the glance which I threw inside, showed me that the whole of the bridal-party were assembled, with the exception of the bride and the bridesmaids.

“My daughter will no doubt be here in a few moments,” said Mr. Trevanion.

I quitted the threshold of the drawing-room door; and was hurrying up to my own chamber, when I encountered Sybilla upon the stairs, followed by her two bridesmaids. She was elegantly dressed in her nuptial apparel. But, Ah! not whiter than her countenance was the dress that she wore—that face was marble pale—and her magnificent eyes appeared to shine with an unnatural fever-light. The vivid scarlet had fled from her lips: they were ashy as those of the dead. And yet the general expression of her features to a mere casual observer, or to one who was not acquainted with all the tremendous secrets cherished in her heart, was that of a firm if not serene resignation. As I was passing Sybilla, her lips—those death-like lips—wavered for a moment, as if she meant to say something, but could not. She caught my hand—pressed it with convulsive violence for an instant—and then descended the stairs, rapidly followed by her bridesmaids, who perhaps wondered at that display of emotion on her part, as well as at the look of immense compassion which I could not help flinging upon her.

Fleet as a fawn I flitted up to my own chamber; and the instant I entered it, I beheld three packets upon the table. Yes, *three*!—and heaven be thanked, the addresses were in the well-known handwriting of Eustace Quentin. On two of these envelopes were written in another hand, evidently that of some official at the Post-Office, these words:—“Mislaid by accident.” Ah! then! the mystery—the painful torturing mystery of that long delay, was thus cleared up; and to the negligence of the Post-Office might be attributed all the cruel suspense and all the harrowing uneasiness I had endured. But no matter now, since the letters had come at last! The dates of the English post-marks showed me that one of the mislaid packages should have been delivered at the end of March, and the other at the end of April; while the third had only just arrived, and was therefore delivered at its proper time. I opened this last-mentioned one first of all:—I opened it before the others, that I might cast a glance at the concluding lines, and assure myself that it had left Eustace Quentin in good health: for when once that assurance was obtained, I felt that I could, with comparative calmness and tranquillity, sit down, and commencing with the first despatch, read them all three regularly through in due order.

Well, then, I opened the third packet. But good heavens, what did I behold? what words were these? Did my sight deceive me? was I dreaming? Oh, if it were a reality! And it was! Yes: the words were there! “*My friend Henry Crawford continues desponding.*” Marvellous! astounding! what could it mean? A glance at the continuation of the paragraph showed me that Eustace himself was in the enjoyment of excellent health. I tore open the first packet—the one which should have been delivered at the end of March. It appeared to be a journal written in continuation of the one which I had received at the close of February. It commenced in the following manner:—

“Madras, October 10th, 1831.

“Nine o’clock in the evening.

“I am sure you will be delighted, dearest Mary, to read that my esteemed friend, poor Henry Crawford, is alive and out of danger. His resuscitation—”

Not another line—not another syllable, did I stay to read then: but hastily locking up the correspondence in a drawer, I sped from the room. Oh! in what a wild state of excitement was I—what a glow of enthusiasm rang tingling through all my veins! It was the frenzy of joy—the delirious ecstasy of an almost frantic delight. I ran—I flew—I precipitated myself down the stairs. I remember that I rushed like a maniac past a couple of servants who were ascending at the time. I heard one of them say, “What ails the girl? she will break her neck:”—but I heeded not the remark—I relaxed not my speed—and in another moment I reached the drawing-room door. But there I stopped short: for all in an instant the idea occurred to me, that if I broke the glad tidings too suddenly to Sybilla, the consequences might be fatal. Happiness too abruptly announced, kills as well as the sudden shock of calamity; and I paused to compose my features—to tranquilize my feelings. But this attempt was not altogether successful: how could I calm my looks or my emotions under such circumstances?

I opened the door: the bridal-party were at that instant preparing to come forth. Sybilla had drawn the white veil over her countenance: but it was seen through—and it was still of marble paleness. I advanced towards her, and said, “Miss Trevanion, I wish to speak to you immediately.”

She started visibly: for she doubtless saw by my look and manner that it was no ordinary message which I had to convey—no commonplace intelligence that I was about to impart.

“What is it?” inquired her father hurriedly: for he might naturally be supposed to be apprehensive of some misadventure occurring to interrupt or mar the progress of his schemes.

“Yes—what is it, Mary?” asked Mrs. Summerly, who was herself evidently astonished at my agitation, which, despite all my endeavours, I was very far from being able completely to subdue.

“I wish to speak to Miss Trevanion alone,” I said, beginning to feel confused: for the eyes of all present were fixed earnestly upon me.

“Who is this girl that seems to give herself such airs?” exclaimed Mr. Woodville, assuming a threatening demeanour.

“I crave a few minutes’ indulgence,” said Miss Trevanion, who for a little space had been struck dumb and motionless by the singularity of my looks. “Come, Mary—we will retire together:”—and before another word of remonstrance could be interjected on the part of Mr. Woodville, she hurried me from the drawing-room. We proceeded to another apartment that opened from the same landing; and the instant we were alone together there, Sybilla threw up her veil, saying in the half-stifled gasping voice of profound suspense, “What is it, Mary? I see you have something of immense importance to communicate—and that it is not of a saddening nature.”

“No, dearest Miss Trevanion—it is very far from that! But prepare yourself—”

“I understand you, Mary!” she cried, in accents of wild and thrilling exultation. “He lives! he lives!”

“Yes—he lives—he did not perish—he was revived—he was resuscitated!” I exclaimed, no longer able to curb my own feelings of delight.

Sybilla uttered not a word aloud; but falling upon her knees, she rested her elbows upon a chair, and burying her face in her hands, offered up to heaven the incense of her heartfelt devotions. The tears of ineffable gladness were streaming down my cheeks; and the emotions I experienced were of a nature that I cannot describe. For several minutes did the young lady remain in that position; and then rising from her knees, she threw herself into my arms, weeping and sobbing with transports of wilder delight. At that instant Mr. Trevanion burst somewhat violently into the room,—exclaiming, “What means this? what does it all signify?”

“It means, father,” replied Sybilla, disengaging herself from my embrace, and advancing towards her sire, while she spoke in accents of mingled solemnity and fervid thankfulness,—“it means, father, that Henry Crawford is alive—that you were either deceived at the India House, or that you cruelly deceived me—”

“Alive!” echoed Mr. Trevanion, turning deadly pale and staggering back, as if struck by a sudden blow; then in a paroxysm of rage, he cried, “No, no—it is false! it is nothing but a vile trick to put an end to this ceremony! it is a device you have arranged with that meddling girl there, whom you treat as an equal!”

“Mary Price is my friend,” responded Sybilla, firmly and resolutely; “indeed, the dearest friend I ever possessed; and she is as incapable of deceit as I am incapable of conniving for such a purpose with her.”

“But the proof—the proof?” ejaculated Mr. Trevanion: “whose word have you that Henry Crawford lives?”

“I have received a letter from India, sir,” said I, “which gives me that joyous intelligence. As yet I have read but a few lines. Miss Trevanion—or rather Mrs. Crawford—is welcome to read the whole; and Mrs. Summery shall likewise read it, sir, if you think fit, to convince you that it is all as I say.”

While I was yet speaking, Mr. Trevanion began to pace the room in an agitated manner. The unfortunate gentleman was bewildered—confounded—almost maddened: he knew not what to do or what to think: the terrible nature of his thoughts was but too plainly depicted on his countenance. Sybilla, melting into the tenderest compassion, accosted her sire, murmuring some words of consolation: but he turned fiercely round upon her, exclaiming in savage tones, “Begone! You are no longer my daughter—you are the cause of my ruin. Begone, I say—begone from my sight!”

“No, dear father, I cannot leave you thus,” she said, earnestly and imploringly. “I beseech you not to gaze upon me in that dreadful manner—look not so pitiless—so wild—”

“Pitiless!” he ejaculated: “am I not a ruined man? am I not altogether undone? what hope is there for me? will you appease my rapacious creditors? will you induce Mr. Woodville to advance the money requisite for the salvation of my property? No, no: you, who might have proved the means of saving me, will be the cause of my ruin!”—and he stamped his foot with rage, his whole form trembling convulsively.

“Father—dear father,” cried Sybilla, wildly, “it is most cruel, it is most unjust of you to accuse me

in this manner. It was not I who threw you into difficulties; and you have seen that I was prepared to make the utmost personal sacrifice in order to save you. But I cannot help what has occurred—Oh, help it—no! And I rejoice—how unfeignedly do I rejoice,” she added with enthusiastic exultation, “that the tidings have come in time to save me from being lost for ever to my beloved Henry!”

“Begone, I say—begone!” thundered forth Mr. Trevanion: “leave me to myself—Begone!”

Sybilla threw herself at her father’s feet, and endeavoured to embrace his knees: but he spurned her away from him. Then she rose, pale as she was so short a time back—she rose with a cold dignity, and said in a corresponding voice of glacial chill, “Father, I can do no more to propitiate you. I have humbled myself as much as I can—as much as I ought. I retire now—and I await your commands, whatever they may be.”

Mr. Trevanion turned aside with furious abruptness; and Sybilla issued forth from the room, followed by myself. She lingered for a moment ere closing the door, in the anxious expectation that her father would call her back or speak some kind word: but he did not—and she at once ascended to my chamber. There she again threw herself into my arms, thanking me for the intelligence I had imparted of her beloved husband’s safety—deploring her father’s anger—weeping, and smiling, and sobbing all in turn. Mrs. Summery made her appearance in the course of a few minutes, and anxiously demanded what had occurred? Then Sybilla, in some brief, hurried, and excited words, made her astonished aunt acquainted with the circumstance that she was already married—that she had believed her husband to be dead—but that through me, the intelligence had just been received that he was alive and well—or at least was so, when the last of the three despatches which had that morning reached me left Madras. Mrs. Summery was indeed overwhelmed with amazement. She said that she had been to look after us both in the room to which we had retired—but she only found Mr. Trevanion there—that he appeared dreadfully agitated—that on questioning him as to what was the matter, he had savagely bade her go and ask her niece—and that she had therefore sought Sybilla in my chamber.

“Do not distress yourself, my dearest girl,” said the excellent-hearted lady, straining her niece to her bosom. “If you are happily married, I am glad enough. Anybody rather than that odious Woodville. It is seldom I take aversions—but I do not like him. And now, dear Sybilla, whatever may happen, you know that you have a home with me; and it shall be a home for your husband likewise. For you tell me that he is a worthy and excellent young man, though poor. Well, poverty is no crime; and as I am better off than even the world thinks me, I can afford to give you a comfortable income.”

Mrs. Crawford—for by this name may I henceforth call her—poured forth her fervid gratitude for all the kind and endearing things her good aunt said; and then she asked in a wild and agitated manner, “But what will become of my poor father? He is ruined. To-day or to-morrow may his creditors come and expel him from his home!”

“Ah! that is sad indeed,” observed Mrs. Summery, shaking her head in mournfulness. “Are his liabilities so very great?”

"I know not their exact amount," responded Sybilla: "but this I do know—that Mr. Woodville was to have paid thirty thousand pounds to my poor father's principal creditor."

"That is a sum which I could only raise by beggaring myself," said Mrs. Summerly. "But I will return to your father at once, and see what he says. Some explanation must be given to Mr. Woodville and the bridal-guests. If he will not give it, the painful task must devolve upon me."

"Let the full truth be told, my dear aunt," exclaimed Sybilla: "let it be announced that I am already married, and that my beloved husband, whom I believed no more, is alive. Let there be no longer any disguise—Oh, that there had never been any!"

"Leave it to me to manage," said the kind-hearted old lady; "and remain you here tranquilly with your friend Mary. I dare say you have a world of things to talk about together. I shall endeavour not to interrupt you for the next hour."

With these words, Mrs. Summerly, having again kissed Sybilla affectionately, issued from the room. The moment she had disappeared, Mrs. Crawford turned anxiously towards me. I understood her meaning full well,—and at once opening the drawer, drew forth the three packets from India. Unfolding the first, we held it between us—in this manner reading its contents. But there is only a small portion of this particular document that I need lay before the reader:—

"Madras, October 10th, 1831.

"Nine o'clock in the evening.

"I am sure you will be delighted, dearest Mary, to read that my esteemed friend, poor Henry Crawford, is alive and out of danger. His resuscitation was slow, tedious, and painful—for a considerable time appearing to defy all hope of his ultimate recovery. But, thank heaven, medical skill, aided by a vigorous constitution, prevailed; and my friend's life was saved. When consciousness fully returned, how wild were the fears which seized upon him, to the effect that the ship which had just sailed would carry to England the tidings of his death, and that his Sybilla would be plunged into despair! But after a time he grew more tranquillized; and when we were alone together in the course of the day, he said, 'No, Quentin: if she hears of it, she will not believe it: for she would only put faith in a rumour of my death if my own spirit appeared to her in fulfilment of the compact. I will write to her by the next ship. Would to heaven I could retrace my way to England, claim her as my wife, and separate from her no more!'—It was thus that he spoke; and the thought that Sybilla would not believe the tale of his death, should it reach her ears, evidently consoled him somewhat. What a narrow escape he had! his soul must have touched upon the very threshold of the other world—upon that world which belongs to eternity!"

The journal, which spread over an entire month, was as usual replete with the most affectionate assurances of unalterable love on the part of Eustace towards myself. In those passages that spoke of Henry Crawford, Captain Quentin represented him as still continuing gloomy and desponding—always full of evil presentiments—always brooding over the sorrows of separation from his beloved Sybilla.

I opened the second document: it was also a journal; and in a strain similar to the preceding one. The third may be described in the same manner: for though it was full of novelty, interest, and pleasing things for me, yet there was no passage of

it which, for the purposes of my narrative, need be laid before the reader. Sybilla perused them all three concurrently with myself; and I observed the tears trickling down her cheeks, as she marked those passages in which Eustace spoke of Henry Crawford's desponding condition. And yet in these letters of mine there were sources of satisfaction for poor Sybilla—apart, I mean, from the one grand and joyous announcement that her husband's life had been saved. That satisfaction existed in the announcement that though unhappy in mind, he was perfectly well in health, and also in the evidences of that devoted and imperishable love which he experienced for his absent wife.

"Is it not strange," said Mrs. Crawford to me when the perusal of the three letters was accomplished, "that I have not received any communication from Henry? The letters he was accustomed to write to me, were wont to be directed to the house of a female friend living but a few miles distant from the Hall. Indeed, she is a cousin of my Henry's, and acted as bridesmaid at our private marriage."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "the same accident, whatever it were, that delayed my Indian letters, may have delayed your's; and this lady of whom you speak, may possibly be receiving them now."

As accident would have it, while I was yet speaking, the door opened—and a female servant entered, bearing a packet which had just been left at the house, directed "to Miss Trevazion." It was the same domestic who had been appointed to attend upon me, and who had expressed so much kind sympathy on behalf of her young mistress. There was now an air of joy and satisfaction upon her countenance; and she lingered to say in a whisper to me, "Mr. Woodville has gone—the other guests are likewise taking their departure—all save Mrs. Summerly, who, it appears, made them some announcement which caused them thus to take flight. Mr. Woodville went away in a towering rage. Your mistress is now closetted with my master. I am so delighted that the odious marriage did not take place!"

Having thus spoken, the female servant quitted the room. She had spoken apart to me in the manner I have described, because Mrs. Crawford, on seizing the packet which was just brought—and she did seize it with avidity too—had torn it open, and was speedily absorbed in its contents; so that she had no thought to bestow upon whatever the maid-servant might have been saying.

"Yes, these letters are from him—from my beloved husband," she said, raising her eyes for a moment towards me after the servant had quitted the room. "Behold! on the envelopes are the same notifications, in some clerk's handwriting, which appear upon your's. '*Mislaid by Accident.*' Oh! how dearly might this accident have cost more than one person! Conceive—if I, already married, had been united this day to Mr. Woodville—!Horror! I shudder when I think of it!"

"But think of it no more, dear Mrs. Crawford," I said; "give yourself up to the joy attendant upon the happy turn which circumstances have experienced."

"I will, I will, Mary. Henry writes me the fondest and most endearing letters: they are not so tinged with melancholy as might have been ex-

pected from what your Captain Quentin tells you in his correspondence. But then Henry does not wish to afflict me, and he writes more cheerfully than he feels."

Sybilla continued perusing those welcome letters: and I turned aside to wipe away the tears that had started from my eyes when she spoke of my Captain Quentin. Alas! I could call him so no longer. Four months had now elapsed since I had penned that letter breaking off everything between us: it had not reached him yet—but in three or four weeks more it would arrive at Madras: for the average length of the voyage might be computed at about five months. But perhaps he would have left Madras before that letter should reach him? He must already have heard of his father's death, and probably he was on his way home?

"My dear Mary," resumed Sybilla, when she had read her letters—and she spoke with a certain solemnity of tone—though not so *deeply* solemn as when on former occasions touching upon the same incident—"what are we to think now of that occurrence of the 10th of October?"

"That it was a strange and wonderful coincidence," I promptly answered; "and though so strange and though so wonderful, yet only a coincidence?"

"Might it not be," asked Sybilla, with a deepening gravity of tone and look, "that during the period of suspended animation, the spirit of my dear husband was separated from the body, and that it flew into the presence of her who, as one of these letters tells me, was uppermost in his anguished, horrifying thoughts during the last instants of his vain struggle against the waves?"

"I am not prepared," was my response, "to enter upon a metaphysical argument on such a subject: but in my own mind, the conviction is strong that there was nothing preternatural in what took place, and that it was merely a coincidence."

"But the hour, Mary?" repeated Sybilla, evidently still clinging to her superstitious tendencies. "Did it not occur at six in the morning at Madras? and was not the corresponding period precisely one o'clock at night in London? How would you account for that?"

"If, dear Mrs. Crawford," said I, "you persist in drawing me into an argument, I must give you the best reasoning I can upon the subject. This earth is peopled by nearly a thousand millions of human beings. Deducting infants and young children, there are still many hundreds of millions of these beings who dream every night in consequence of certain impressions which positive facts and real circumstances have made upon their minds. Now, must it not occur that out of so many millions of visions nightly dreamt, one or two will occasionally be realized in all its details—incident for incident, day for day, hour for hour? Assuredly such must be the case; and however rare and far-between these coincidences may be, still in the chapter of accidents they will now and then occur. Your vision was one of these coincidences."

Sybilla gave no immediate answer: she was evidently struck by the reasoning I had advanced—and she reflected profoundly. At length she said, "There is too much truth, Mary, in what you advance for me altogether to resist its force. I do begin to think that the morbid state of my mind,

at the time when the incident happened, had much to do with conjuring it up. Oh! if my Henry returns eventually, in good health, to be restored to my arms, I feel that I shall be enabled to escape from the thrall of gloomy forebodings and evil presentiments!"

Mrs. Summerly now returned to the chamber; and by her look we both immediately saw that the intelligence she had to impart was not altogether of a gloomy character.

"I have had a long and serious conversation with your father," she said. "I persuaded him to subdue his excitement, and to talk calmly and rationally with me upon the state of his affairs. I do not understand much about such things; but I have every reason to fancy and to hope that his position is not irredeemable. If these thirty thousand pounds could be paid off, the observance of a rigid economy might render the estate adequate to meet all other liabilities, and to furnish a sufficient revenue for your father's wants. In short, Sybilla, I have made him a certain proposition—which is, that if he will settle the estate upon you at his death, I will raise him that money. I told you just now that I am better off than the world thinks me. I have fifteen thousand pounds of hoarded money at my disposal, and which I all along intended to bequeath to you. My friend Mr. Appleton will, I know, advance the other fifteen thousand; and thus your father can be saved from ruin. It is moreover arranged that you are to go with me at once to the villa. Your father is for the present somewhat sore—you know that he is irritable—and it will be better that you should come and take up your abode with me for at least a few weeks. What say you, Sybilla?"

What could she say? There were fresh outpourings of gratitude on her part towards the worthy old lady who was thus doing all she could for her beautiful young niece, as well as for Mr. Trevanion himself. This gentleman's carriage was ordered to be gotten in readiness; and it was with feelings of infinite relief that Sybilla threw off her bridal dress. When I attended Mrs. Summerly in her own chamber, as she put on her travelling garb, I could not help observing, "Out of evil comes good. Had not the milliner disappointed you with your dress in the way she did, I should not have had my letters brought from London: and, Oh! what fearful consequences would have ensued!"

"Fearful indeed!" echoed Mrs. Summerly.

When everything was in readiness for departure, Mr. Trevanion sent up a message to say that he wished to see his daughter before she left. Sybilla proceeded with a palpitating heart to the room where he awaited her: but he was now calm and tranquil—indeed almost to coldness. He said that he did not wish her to leave him in anger, and that for her aunt's sake he was disposed to forgive her. She might have upbraided him—and with ample reason too—for the cheat he had practised by pretending to have received at the India House such positive confirmation of Henry Crawford's death, and which deception he had no doubt concocted in order to strengthen her in her decision to accept the hand of Mr. Woodville. Yes—Sybilla might have upbraided her father for this cruel fraud: but she did not. She was too glad at the conciliatory demeanour he adopted towards her—too happy to allow him to be

the forgiver and herself the recipient of forgiveness, so that they might separate without ill-will.

We returned to Sunbeam Villa; and that evening Sybilla was once more installed in her own chamber beneath her kind aunt's roof.

CHAPTER CCXV.

A VISIT FROM OLD FRIENDS.

THE incident I am about to describe, took place a month after the occurrences related in the preceding chapter; and it was therefore now the end of June. Having received another kind and affectionate letter from Eustace Quentin, I had retired to my own chamber to peruse it, and had scarcely finished its contents, when the housemaid came up to inform me that a gentleman and lady had called to see me, and that they were in the parlour down stairs, conversing with Mrs. Summerly and Mrs. Crawford: for Sybilla now passed by her married name. I asked who they were? but the housemaid could not inform me, as Goldworthy had given them admittance. Having on a morning-gown, I hastened to change my apparel; and at the expiration of ten minutes, descended to the parlour, wondering who the lady and gentleman could possibly be. I was agreeably surprised to find that they were Mr. and Mrs. Kingston: but this feeling of pleasure almost instantaneously vanished, when I observed that they were also in mourning—and the thought flashed to me that they had come to announce the death of Laura Maitland.

"My dear Mary," said Mrs. Kingston, kissing me, "I am truly rejoiced to see you. I had really begun to think that I should never behold you again. It is a good fifteen months since we parted in Guernsey."

"How are you, my dear girl?" cried the Squire, giving me such a cordial shake of the hand that fully indicated his honest friendship towards me. "We have been talking about you with the two ladies," he added, glancing towards Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla; "and we have all agreed that you are one of the naughtiest girls that ever existed—that nobody can possibly like you—and that you can't have any friends in the whole wide world."

"Now, my dear Tom," said Mrs. Kingston, laughing, "don't you see that Mary is looking quite astonished at you?"

"She understands very well I was speaking by contraries," rejoined the Squire. "Why, when it was known at the Grange that we meant to, come up to London, every body there was saying, 'Oh, do go and see Mary Price!' and there wasn't a person in the house that didn't send the kindest regards to you. Why, I do believe that if the horses could talk, they would have all sent their best love likewise."

"Hold your tongue, you silly fellow," said Mrs. Kingston: "you know perfectly well that Mary never would venture to mount any one of the horses—not even the mahogany chesnut, although it was the honestest and cleverest animal of the whole stud."

"By the bye," continued the Squire, "Luke told me to mind and tell you that the old roan does his work as well as ever, and hasn't knocked down

any turnpike-men lately—only thrust his head through a paper-pane in a barber's window down in the Walmer Road the other day, and frightened the barber so that he nearly cut a man's nose off whom he was shaving at the time."

By the discourse which was thus taking place, I saw plainly enough that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston were not in mourning for Laura Maitland—or they would not have been thus joyous and happy. My mind was therefore relieved of a very serious apprehension: but at the same time I could not help observing that both Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla appeared somewhat gloomy and thoughtful, although they were pleased to pass some friendly eulogies upon my conduct in echo to those which the Squire had vouchsafed.

"We will now leave you with your friends, dear Mary," said Mrs. Summerly: and she accordingly quitted the room, followed by Sybilla.

"Come, my dear girl," said Mrs. Kingston, as soon as I was alone with her and the Squire, "I must give you another kiss—for you don't know what a favourite you are with us. Every body loves you, Mary: and these two ladies have spoken of you in such high terms—"

"Now don't, Lizzy," interrupted the Squire, laughing: "you know that Mary doesn't like to be told even of her excellencies; and that's the reason why I just spoke of them by the rule of contraries."

"I see that you are looking at our mourning, my dear girl," said Mrs. Kingston: then in a voice of sincerest sympathy, she added, "And in one sense we were truly sorry to hear of your loss. But you have a good brother left; and I am certain that he will prove all you can wish or hope for. As for ourselves, it is rather a matter of form that we have assumed a mourning apparel; and we do not affect any depth of grief which in our hearts we cannot truly feel. We are in mourning for Mrs. Maitland, who died at Brighton a few months back. She had not leave a single shilling of her property to Laura, but the whole bulk of it to a cousin—a very distant relation whom she never saw three times in her life. Fortunately Laura did not want it, she herself being, as you well know, possessed of a handsome fortune."

"And you will be rejoiced to hear, Mary," said the Squire, "that the physician has at length pronounced Laura to be perfectly restored to the possession of her reason: but he recommends that she should enjoy the utmost tranquillity. She is not therefore coming to the Grange, at least for the present; and on no account would she go back to Guernsey. She fancies that she should like to live in the neighbourhood of London; and so we are going to look out for a pleasant little residence for her somewhere in the environs of Kensington or Hammersmith."

I expressed the satisfaction which it gave me to learn that the psychological treatment had been successful in respect to a young lady whom I so sincerely loved.

"And now, Mary," said Mrs. Kingston, taking up the thread of the discourse in her turn, "we must explain to you one of the objects of our visit. Laura is most anxious to have you with her, as her friend and companion. She is in a very delicate state of health, as you may suppose, after all she

has gone through; and on no account must her wishes be thwarted wherever there is a possibility of fulfilling them. We told Mrs. Summerly and that young lady who was with her——”

“Her niece, Mrs. Crawford,” I observed.

“Crawford? how singular!” said Mrs. Kingston, glancing towards her husband: then, as if thinking no more of the little coincidence which appeared to have struck her, she went on to observe, “Yes—we frankly explained to those ladies how you had been situated in respect to Miss Maitland—all you had done for her—all you had suffered on account of that villain who endeavoured to ensnare her—and how deeply she loves you. Mrs. Summerly and her niece expressed the sincerest regard for you,—declaring that it would grieve them beyond description to part from you; but at the same time confessing that under such peculiar circumstances, they must sacrifice their own wishes on behalf of Miss Maitland. Now, Mary, I have explained myself; and it rests with you to give the final decision.”

Ah! now I understood wherefore it was that my excellent mistress and Sybilla had appeared gloomy and thoughtful; and I confess that I hesitated for a minute ere I answered.

“We know all that Mrs. Summerly did for you when your poor brother died,” said Mrs. Kingston: “William told us of her kindness. But you need not for a moment fear that this kind-hearted lady will tax you with ingratitude for leaving her: she is incapable of entertaining such a suspicion concerning you—she knows you better. Go and speak to her yourself, my dear Mary; and you will see that I have only placed the exact truth before you.”

“Oh, I am full well aware of that, my dear Mrs. Kingston!” I exclaimed: “and not for a moment——”

“Yes, yes—go, Mary,” interrupted the Squire. “It will look better on your part, and will be more satisfactory. So canter off, there’s a dear girl.”

I accordingly proceeded to the drawing-room, to which Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla had retired; and they made me sit between them upon the sofa.

“It will grieve us both very much to part from you, my dear Mary,” said Mrs. Summerly, taking one of my hands, while Sybilla took the other: “but under circumstances we feel that there is a necessity. It was only yesterday that Sybil and I were arranging a plan to put you on a different footing in this house. We intended to make you our companion and have you altogether with us—treating you as a friend—in which light Sybil has so long considered you. I only mention this, dear Mary, to convince you how we both appreciate your excellent qualities: but Miss Maitland has decidedly prior claims upon your friendship. She is an invalid—she is suffering—and enough has been revealed to us of her past history, to enlist our warmest sympathies. Therefore, dear Mary, you must go—you must leave us: but fortunately Miss Maitland intends to reside near London, and you will have frequent opportunities of seeing us.”

“Yes, my dear friend,” observed Sybilla, with the tears trickling from her eyes, “you must leave us. It is a sacred duty which you have to perform towards a young lady who has suffered so much and who loves you so dearly. Mr. and Mrs. Kingston have promised that we shall be introduced to Miss

Maitland: we shall occasionally call upon her—she will also visit us at the Villa—and thus shall we meet.”

Finding that Mrs. Summerly and her niece had made up their minds to sacrifice their own feelings to what they considered the prior claim which Miss Maitland had upon me, I offered no objection; and returning to Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, gave my consent to the arrangements proposed. They were well pleased to hear it, and informed me that in a few days I should have to remove to my new place of residence.

“I dare say,” said Mrs. Kingston, “that you will be pleased to hear that Tom Scudder is getting on famously at Deal. But of course your brother William has told you this, as he and Jane frequently see the Scudders. By the bye, I should inform you,” she added, laughing heartily, “that the village of Walmer has been rid at length of those incorrigible gossips, Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins. They got up a tale but little to the credit of a young lady who was going to be married, and circulated it most industriously. It was much worse than Miss Marigold’s business. However, it did not prevent the marriage after all: for the young lady’s character was completely cleared up. But her father was so inveterate that he was resolved to punish Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins for the scandal. So he brought an action against them in his daughter’s name: it was tried at the Maidstone Assizes last April, and a verdict of a thousand pounds’ damages was given against each of the old ladies. The very next morning after the result of the trial was known, Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins evaporated from Walmer.”

“As good a riddance,” observed the Squire, “as that of a couple of glandered horses would be out of a stable.”

“And what of Mrs. Mildmay?” I asked: “and the old Admiral?”

“The affair of Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins,” replied Mrs. Kingston, “has given Mrs. Mildmay so salutary a warning that she has abstained from scandal ever since. Indeed, she was pretty deeply implicated in the same affair with the two old ladies; and her husband was nearly being prosecuted also on her account. But a witness was wanted to prove the case against Mrs. French and Mrs. Popkins; and so Mrs. Mildmay coolly turned round upon them and gave evidence against them. The two old ladies vowed and protested that the calumny originated with her in the first instance; and I dare say it was true enough. However, through Mrs. Mildmay’s evidence, the case was proved, and the result was as I have described it. As for the old Admiral, he goes about dinner-hunting as usual: but I think that he has also received a lesson in respect to scandal-mongering. But we must go now, Mary; and in a day or two we shall come and see you again.”

The Squire and Mrs. Kingston thereupon took their departure; and I ascended to my chamber to write to William and tell him of the new arrangements that had been made concerning me. In this letter I enclosed one for dear Jane, who frequently sent the most affectionately and prettily written missives to me. By the time I had finished my correspondence, it was the usual dinner-hour in the kitchen: but the housemaid came up and informed

me that Mrs. Summerly desired to see me in the drawing-room. Thither I accordingly repaired; and again was I made to sit between her and Sybilla on the sofa.

"You are no longer a dependant beneath this roof," said Mrs. Summerly: "you are a friend—a visitress—a guest—whatever you like to consider yourself. I have got a new maid coming this evening. Now, no remonstrance, Mary: it must be as I have said;—and surely during the few days you have to remain here, you will give us as much of your company as you possibly can?"

"But I do not wish," I remarked, after expressing my thanks for the worthy lady's kindness, "that those down stairs should think that I am elevated above them."

"Nonsense, my dear girl!" said Mrs. Summerly: "they will be delighted to know that you are entering on a new phase of your existence. It is impossible you can continue in a menial capacity any longer: you have raised yourself above it. It is not others who are raising you: your own good conduct has achieved this for yourself; and instead of thanking any one else, you have only to be proud of yourself. Mrs. Kingston has emphatically declared that never again can you be permitted to hold a dependant position; and I must frankly observe," added Mrs. Summerly, smiling, "that the Squire ratified his wife's averment with an oath: but it was so honestly expressed, and with so much blunt sincerity, that I really was not shocked at it."

"My dear Mary," said the worthy lady's niece, "henceforth I am not Mrs. Crawford to you—I am plain and simple Sybilla. If you do not address me in that way, I shall be hurt and mortified: I shall think that you do not love me as much as you profess and as much as I love you."

"Mary will manifest that friendliness towards you, Sybil," said Mrs. Summerly. "And now, my dear girl, I as an old woman may tell you things which would look like flattery if coming from the lips of another. Amidst the duties of servitude you have found leisure to cultivate your natural talents and improve your mind: you are therefore well educated—for self-instruction is often the best; and if you do not possess what may be termed elegant accomplishments, you are endowed with something that is much better: namely, sound, solid, and useful knowledge. Your manners are those of a well-bred lady: for you have had opportunities of observing the amenities and courtesies of life; and with a quick aptitude you have adopted all that are truly embellishing, without catching up those that are frivolous and affected. In all these qualifications you are self-made. Add to such advantages the exceeding personal beauty which you possess, and there is no reason, Mary, why you should not adorn that society into which you are about to enter. You gave Sybilla permission to explain to me the contents of all those letters you have received from India, together with other particulars concerning you: I therefore comprehend how you are situated in respect to Captain Queutin. I do not pretend to be a prophetess—I do not know how that affair may possibly end: and if I allude to it at all, it is merely to express the kind hope that your merits will not go unrewarded, but that they will be crowned with all possible happiness."

I was melted to tears by the kind manner in which Mrs. Summerly addressed me; and I embraced her of my own accord.

"Now, my dear girl," she continued, "to turn the conversation upon another topic, I am sure you will be well pleased to hear that Mr. Trevanion's affairs have a healthier aspect than could have been expected. Worthy Mr. Appleton at once advanced the necessary sum to relieve the estate from immediate danger; and as he had plenty of spare capital, he declared his readiness to pay off the entire liabilities and become the sole creditor, provided the estate itself should prove to be worth what it is represented. It has been surveyed, and is found to be more valuable than was originally supposed: therefore in a few days all Mr. Trevanion's present creditors will be settled with, and Mr. Appleton will alone hold a mortgage on the estate."

I was delighted to hear such agreeable intelligence, and sincerely congratulated Sybilla upon the improved prospect of her father's affairs. After a little more pleasant conversation, she exclaimed, "Now, Mary, I am going to give you some of my music, in that strain which I know you loved when I was first a resident at the villa."

Thereupon she seated herself at the harp, and rang forth one of those peculiar and improvised pieces of varied and wondrous harmony which threw the entire frame into a glow of excitement. She was in better spirits that day than ever I had before seen her; and she took an opportunity of whispering in my ear that she was gradually shaking off the influence of gloomy presentiments and superstitious beliefs.

When the dinner-hour arrived, I sat down to table with Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla; and they did their best to place me entirely at my ease and make me feel that they were showing me no favour in thus elevating me to an equality with themselves—but that it was a position which I had achieved for myself. In the course of the evening four or five of Mrs. Summerly's friends called at the Villa: a hurried whisper from the kind old lady made them acquainted with the circumstances in which I was now placed beneath her roof—and I experienced the most delicate attention: for Mrs. Summerly's acquaintances were all of a kindred feeling to her own, and belonged not to that class who look down with scorn and contempt upon an individual rising up from a lower one. Mr. Appleton likewise came in the course of the evening; and cordial indeed was the grasp of the hand that he gave me, while with a look he expressed his gratification at finding me there, in the drawing-room.

In a couple of days Mr. and Mrs. Kingston called again, and informed me that they had taken a house between Kensington and Hammersmith, in a picturesque situation, with large gardens, and in every way suited for Miss Maitland's occupancy. It was ready furnished, there being no certainty that she would like to continue there for any considerable length of time. Mrs. Kingston assured me that Laura was greatly delighted when she learnt that I had consented to take up my abode with her; and it was arranged that in three days more I should leave Sunbeam Villa and repair to my new home. The Squire and his wife intended to remain in London until they had seen their cousin fully installed in her abode and all her comforts duly cared for.



The three days passed—and the morning of departure arrived. All my preparations were made; and at eleven o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Kingston were to come and fetch me. Poor Mrs. Summerly looked very mournful and caressed her pets in a languid and abstracted manner; while Sybilla could not restrain her tears. I was much affected at the thought of parting from these excellent ladies—the more so that I knew Mrs. Crawford would miss me very much. When the hour was approaching, they both presented me with several very handsome gifts—mementos of the kind friendship they experienced for me. Precisely at eleven Mr. and Mrs. Kingston arrived in a carriage which had been purchased for Miss Maitland's use; and they were at once shown into the parlour, where I speedily joined them,—Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla remaining up in the drawing-room.

"Have you everything in readiness?" asked Mrs.

Kingston: "for I can assure you that Laura, who entered her new abode yesterday, is most anxious to see you."

"I am perfectly ready," was my answer; "and will now go and take leave of Mrs. Summerly and Mrs. Crawford."

"Ah! now that you mention the young lady's name again," said Mrs. Kingston, "it puts me in mind of a question I intended to ask you the first day we were here, but which has since slipped my memory. This Mrs. Crawford—is she any relation to the Crawfords of Essex?"

"She is the wife of Lieutenant Henry Crawford," I replied, "who is now at Madras:"—and I experienced a sensation of mingled hope and suspense, in some anticipation of what I was about to hear.

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Kingston, with a look of intelligence at her husband. "Then I can assure you she has very pleasing tidings to hear; and it can

only be in consequence of some delay on the part of my late aunt's solicitors, that a communication with the Crawfords of Essex has not already been made."

"Oh! I understand you!" I exclaimed, my heart gushing with joyous emotions. "Mr. Crawford—Sybilla's husband—is the heir to the late Mrs. Maitland's property—is it not so?"

"It is, dear Mary," responded Mrs. Kingston: "and you have now the pleasing duty of announcing to your friend that her husband has suddenly inherited two thousand a-year!"

An ejaculation of enthusiastic rapture burst from my lips—and darting from the room I sprang upstairs, three at a time. Rushing most unceremoniously into the apartment where Mrs. Summerly and her niece were seated together, I exclaimed, "Dearest Sybilla, I have the happiest tidings for you—Oh, the happiest!"

"For me?" she cried, while both herself and aunt gazed upon me in wonder and suspense.

"Yes," I quickly answered. "Your husband—Mr. Crawford—is a rich man—he has inherited two thousand a-year!"

Sybilla sank down, almost overpowered, upon the sofa whence she had risen when I burst into the room; and in a few hurried words I proceeded to explain how it had all happened,—concluding by the proffer of my sincerest congratulations on account of a freak of fortune which would thus enable Mr. Crawford to return speedily to England.

"I remember that Henry did on one or two occasions speak of an aunt who lived at Brighton and was very rich," observed Sybilla, when the first raptures of joy had somewhat subsided: "but I do not think that he ever mentioned her name to me—and certainly experienced not the slightest hope in that quarter. Then, it would appear that my Henry must be distantly related to Mrs. Kingston? and as his wife, I may claim some little connexion with that lady."

"Let us descend to the parlour," said Mrs. Summerly, "and see Mary's friends."

Accordingly, we all three went down together, and both the Squire and his excellent-hearted wife were overjoyed to find that the intelligence so recently given had poured such a flood of happiness into Sybilla's soul. For myself, it considerably mitigated the pangs of separation from Mrs. Summerly and her niece, to think that the prospects of the latter were so suddenly changed through the good fortune of her husband, and that the next letter she wrote to him at Madras would contain tidings well calculated to cheer him up from despondency.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

MY NEW HOME.

THE farewells were said—and I quitted Sunbeam Villa in company with Mr. and Mrs. Kingston. In an hour and a half the carriage reached Miss Maitland's house; and I was speedily clasped in that young lady's arms. But, Oh! how altered she had become from what she was on the first day that I ever beheld her at Kingston Grange. Then she had a roscate tinge upon her cheeks—and though it was but delicate, still it relieved them from an

excessive pallor: now that tint had fled entirely and her countenance was of the whiteness of Parian marble. Then too, her form had displayed fine proportions: now it was of more than sylphid slenderness—it was thin almost to emaciation. Her eyes, of the deepest blue, had lighted up with joy at beholding me; but when the first feeling of gladness was past, they assumed an expression of mingled mournfulness and resignation which now appeared habitual to them. When first I knew her, she was high-spirited and impetuous; and these characteristics were to a certain extent visible in her demeanour, although she was naturally so amiable and generous-hearted. But now her mood appeared to be half-languishing, half-sedate—as if there were a solemn seriousness in her soul, mingled with a certain lassitude of life. But her intellects were completely restored: there was not the slightest wandering in her gaze—no vacancy in her look—no incoherency in her speech, to denote that her reason had ever experienced a shock or an aberration. I have already said she was rejoiced to see me; and had we been bosom-friends from our earliest childhood, I could not have experienced a kinder welcome from Laura Maitland.

The house was not a large one, but commodious and handsomely-furnished. It had a pleasant flower-garden in front, and a large kitchen-garden in the rear—with coach-house and stabling, and every convenience requisite for the establishment of a young lady of ample means. Servants had been already engaged upon the very best recommendations; and they appeared to be a different set indeed from those whom I had found at Miss Maitland's house in Guernsey. The bed-chamber allotted to myself, opened from Laura's, and was cheerfully situated. She wished me to have a maid to attend exclusively upon me: but to this proposal I would not for a moment consent. I saw that my delicate feeling upon the point was duly appreciated by Miss Maitland and the Kingstons; and the offer, though kindly and sincerely made, was not therefore pressed. But though I dispensed with such special attendance, I nevertheless took up my abode with Miss Maitland upon a footing of perfect equality: for so she willed it to be. As Sybilla had previously done, in respect to her own christian name, Miss Maitland insisted upon being simple *Laura* to me,—assuring me that she should feel hurt and annoyed if I treated her with any degree of formality,—that she had sought my companionship as a friend, and only in that light.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Kingston took their departure, which was about a week after my installation in my new home, the latter sought an opportunity of having a little private conversation with me.

"My dear Mary," she said, "ere I leave it is necessary to make all requisite arrangements for your comfort and well-being; and as Laura does not like talking upon the topic which I am about to approach, I have undertaken the task for her. It is about money-matters—and therefore we will hurry over them as quick as ever we can. You know that Laura is an heiress: she has just come of age, and is now in possession of all her fortune, amounting to about forty thousand pounds. Therefore, though she intends to live very retired and very quiet for the sake of her health, she neverthe-

less has a certain position to maintain. You, as her friend—her constant companion—her adopted sister, I may say—for in such a light does she regard you—will have to support a corresponding appearance. In short, you will have many expenses, Mary. Laura therefore hopes you will receive two hundred a-year for this expenditure on your part; and here is the sum for the first year.”

Thus speaking, Mrs. Kingston placed in my hand a very beautiful purse containing a quantity of gold in one end and of notes in the other. But I assured her that I could not think of receiving half that amount—scarcely even a quarter. She would not listen to the slightest remonstrance. I was therefore over-ruled, and constrained to surrender: but I failed not to express the deep gratitude I experienced for the great generosity thus shown me.

“Now, my dear girl,” proceeded Mrs. Kingston, “that we have done talking of money-matters, I wish to tell you something which I learnt only yesterday from the physician under whose care poor Laura had been so long, and who will continue to visit her from time to time. The truth is,” continued Mrs. Kingston, with a deepening seriousness of look and growing sadness of the voice, “the physician begins to entertain an apprehension that Laura’s lungs are affected. There certainly are some symptoms of pulmonary disease: but he hopes that, with youth and a good constitution to support her, she will triumph over the germs of an insidious malady. God grant that it may be so! Not a syllable of this has been breathed to Laura herself: but you must watch her attentively, my dear Mary, and seize opportunities of reporting to the physician the state of her health. And you must write frequently to us at the Grange—more frequently than Laura is to be made aware of: for the greatest caution is to be exercised in preventing her from suspecting that the condition of her health inspires any real alarm. I have nothing more to say, Mary: I know that in you she will possess a sincere friend—an affectionate and attentive companion.”

I was much distressed to hear that poor Miss Maitland had exhibited any symptoms of a decline; and I faithfully promised to fulfil all Mrs. Kingston’s instructions.

When the kind-hearted Squire and his wife had taken their departure from London, I began to feel all the responsibility of the position in which I stood: for Laura Maitland left the entire control of the household to me—and whenever the servants applied to her for instructions or information on particular points, her answer invariably was, “You must speak to Miss Price.” Fortunately, as already hinted, I had a very different set of domestics to deal with from those who were at the young lady’s house in Guernsey; and as I treated them with the utmost kindness and urbanity, I experienced in return a proportionate degree of civility and respectful attention. Although Miss Maitland’s intellects were completely restored, yet there was that melancholy languor left behind to which I have previously alluded; and it seemed as if it required an effort and an exertion for her to do even the commonest things. She remained late in bed of a morning, and appeared to consider the process of the toilet most tedious and wearisome. When she descended to the drawing-room, she would throw herself on a sofa, and not think of moving till I suggested that she

ought to take exercise—such as a walk in the garden or an airing in the carriage. Then, with the sweetest and most angelic smile—but a smile that was full of a melancholy pathos,—she would express her assent to my recommendation, and indeed appeared willing to be guided by me in all things. She treated me as if I were her sister,—not with any studied demonstrations of attachment, but with a love that was warm, deep, and invariably the same. There was this delicacy, too, in her whole bearing towards me,—that she always spoke and acted as if I had never been in any inferior position to that in which I now found myself—as if, in short, she had always known me on a footing of the most perfect equality. But she seldom alluded to any past circumstances which were in the slightest degree connected with all which she had suffered: she would speak in the kindest terms of her cousins the Kingstons—but not of her own last visit to the Grange; and as for even the bare name of the island of Guernsey, it never passed her lips.

During the first fortnight of her instalment in her new home, several of the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood left their cards at her house,—they having heard from Miss Maitland’s physician, who himself moved in the highest circles, that she was a young lady of handsome fortune and good family. Laura observed to me that if I thought I should be dull without some little society, she would accept the overtures of acquaintance thus made: but I saw full well that she preferred to dwell in the strictest retirement—and as for myself, I had no ambition to mingle in gay company. An assurance to this effect did I give Miss Maitland; and the visits were not returned. But I should observe that before the Kingstons had left London, Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla had called at the house; and these were the only persons with whom Laura chose to be upon visiting terms.

About a month had elapsed from the date of my instalment in my present position, when one forenoon, as I was going out to make some purchases for myself and Miss Maitland, at the nearest linen-draper’s, I met my old friend *Jemima*. She was accompanied by three children; and these I at once recognized to be the orphans whom Lord and Lady Harlesdon’s death had thrown under the care of their aunt Lady Oldeastle. *Alexander Adolphus*—who was now indeed Lord Harlesdon—was nine years old: *Albert Henry* was seven: *Isabella Clementina* was five and a half. I had always liked these children: but the youngest was an especial favourite of mine—for I could never forget how she had been carried off by the gipsies, and how I had rescued her, in company with poor *Mad Tommy*. The moment I beheld them all, I hastened forward and caught *Isabella* up in my arms, covering her with kisses; and though she did not recollect me, yet she received my fondlings with joyous delight. The two boys, immediately recognizing me, began addressing me in the most endearing terms; and as for *Jemima*, she literally wept with rapture at beholding me again. But when the first effusion of her joy at this meeting was past, she began to look at me attentively; and perceiving that I was not dressed exactly as a servant-maid, she said, “I hope *Mary*—*Miss Price*—I haven’t given you any offence.”

"Offence, *Jemima*?" I exclaimed, taking her hand once more and pressing it warmly: "what on earth do you mean? I cannot understand you."

"I mean, *Miss*, that you are evidently a young lady now," she replied: and she immediately added, "But so you always were in manners and conduct, if not in position; and our poor dear late mistress often said so in my hearing."

"It is true, *Jemima*, that circumstances have somewhat altered with me," I answered: "but in no way am I altered towards you. I am not *Miss Price* to you, but simple *Mary* as heretofore; and you will grieve me if you address me otherwise. I am living in this neighbourhood—at that house which you see yonder in the garden—as the friend and the adopted sister of an amiable and excellent young lady, *Miss Maitland*. And you *Jemima*—I perceive that you are still with *Lady Oldcastle*? Or at least I presume so."

"Yes," she replied: and then lowering her voice to a whisper, she said, "If it were not for these dear children who are so fond of me, I should not have remained in her ladyship's service a quarter so long as I have: and as it is, I shall not be there much longer—for a particular reason. But I should tell you that we are close neighbours of your's—*Lady Oldcastle* has lived for the last eight or ten months in that house which you see yonder amongst the trees, a quarter of a mile distant: and therefore I shall often have the pleasure of meeting you when I go out with the children."

"Yes: and you must bring them to see me," I said: "it will give me the greatest delight to have them occasionally for an hour or two."

"Have you ever seen anything more of that person?" inquired *Jemima*: "you know who I mean—*my Prince de Chantilly*, and *your Count de Montville*."

"He is no longer an inhabitant of this world," I answered: "he died some time ago in *Guernsey*:"—but I did not choose to explain the manner of his death; for knowing that *Jemima* had once loved him, I was fearful the intelligence might produce a painful impression on her mind.

"Ah! then he is gone," she said. "Well, I forgive him the money he robbed me of, and the delusion with which he buoyed me up:"—then in a blither tone, but accompanied by a look of modest archness and a flushing of the cheeks, she added, "I have long ago given up dreaming of *Princes*, *Mary*: but in a few months' time I shall leave *Lady Oldcastle's* service—because—I am going to change my condition. In short, I am going to be married."

"And I sincerely congratulate you, *Jemima*," said I, "if it will be an alliance suited to the promotion of your happiness."

"Yes—thank heaven, there is every prospect that it will be so," she responded, speaking in a low voice, so that the children might not overhear what we were saying together. "My intended husband is a very nice young man, though I say it—a superior young man too. He is a clerk in the office of a solicitor who lives in this neighbourhood, and whose business is chiefly with the nobility and great folks. *Charles Hunter*—that is the name of my intended—has very good prospects; for though at present he has only twenty-five shillings a-week,

yet his employer has taken a great fancy to him, and is rapidly showing him more and more confidence and favour; and when his salary is raised to thirty shillings, which it is to be in a little time, the wedding will take place. So now, my dear *Mary*, I have told you exactly how I am situated and what my prospects are. I have saved up a little money of my own again; and he also has got some savings—for he is a prudent and steady young man; and therefore with our joint funds we shall have quite enough to commence housekeeping. Oh! how delighted I shall be to receive a visit from you in a little house of my own! And wouldn't I make much of you! and shouldn't you be sincerely welcome!" ejaculated the good-hearted *Jemima*.

"And I shall be equally rejoiced to pay you a visit under such auspicious circumstances:"—but as I was still speaking, I observed *Jemima* give a sudden start, while her countenance became radiant with joy, although a blush mantled on her cheeks. I instinctively glanced round in the same direction where she was looking, and perceived that the object of her regards was a young man about five-and-twenty—very good-looking—of genteel appearance—and neatly though plainly dressed. He carried in his hand a packet of documents, the legal character of which was unmistakable alike from their form, the bluish hue of the paper, and the red tape tied around. It required no word of explanation from *Jemima's* lips to make me aware that this was *Charles Hunter*, her intended husband. He was walking quickly at the moment I thus caught the first glimpse of him; for he had not perceived *Jemima* so soon as she saw him: but when his eyes did meet her own, he suddenly relaxed his pace, and appeared to hesitate whether he should accost her while talking to one who was a stranger to him. She however beckoned him to approach; and then hastening towards her, he took her hand and pressed it with evident effusion—at the same time flinging upon her a look expressive of the most truthful affection. Then he lifted his hat and made a courteous bow to me, which I acknowledged with becoming civility.

"I shall now leave you, *Jemima*," I said, knowing full well—for, Ah! I judged her feelings by what would have been my own in such a case—that she would rather seize that present opportunity to exchange a few words with her lover, than remain in discourse even with an old friend. So I shook her by the hand, kissed the three children one after the other, and proceeded on my way to make the purchases needed by myself and *Miss Maitland*.

Time passed on—weeks and months glided away—and during this interval I continued to receive periodical communications from *Eustace Quentin*. Often and often did I think with what grief he must in the mean time have received the letter which I had written to break off the engagement between us; and it cut me to the very soul to reflect that while that letter had been speeding to *Madras*, these affectionate missives of unabated love had crossed it at successive points and intervals on the wide ocean,—these missives over which I shed scalding tears when they reached my hands and when my eyes dwelt upon them! And during that interval of several months, I frequently saw *Mrs. Summerly* and *Sybilla*—and was rejoiced to perceive that the spirits of the latter were gradually recover-

ing the healthiest tone, and that instead of yielding to despondency and gloomy presentiment, she learnt how to experience trustfulness and hope. For had she not full reason for this reviving confidence in the future? were not letters on the way to India informing Henry Crawford that a fortune had been left him? and would not the happy tidings bring him back as speedily as possible to England? At least once a week Mrs. Summerly and Sybilla came to dine and pass the evening with Laura and myself; and sometimes—though not quite so often—Laura would accompany me to Sunbeam Villa to return the visit. I must not forget to add that I frequently saw *Jemima*. She used to call at the house and bring the children with her; and those little ones were always rejoiced when they came to pass an hour in my society. *Jemima* continued to speak in the highest terms of her intended husband *Charles Hunter*; and as the time approached for their wedding-day to be fixed, she frequently amused me with an account of the preparations she was already making for the bridal, and the plans he had settled for the housekeeping of married life.

The year was drawing to a close—it was now the end of October—and the period was at hand when I might expect another letter from *Eustace Quentin*. It arrived,—bearing the date of the commencement of June, at which period he had received a letter from his mother *Lady Wilberton*, making him acquainted with his father's death. He evidently wrote in very low spirits; and from the tenour of his letter I had no difficulty in comprehending that *Lady Wilberton* had not omitted, in her communication, to make him acquainted with those injunctions of his late parent which so intimately regarded himself in respect to his fortune and his love for me. Yes: there was not a doubt in my mind that her ladyship *had* sent him a copy of that portion of his father's will; although in his letter to me he carefully abstained from even the slightest allusion thereto. But, when reiterating his wonted vows and pledges of continued affection, he dwelt in that letter emphatically and earnestly upon the assurance that no earthly consideration could alter his heart or his mind towards me, and that he was still prepared, as ever, to set aside all family reasons and representations that could be possibly advanced against our alliance. Indeed, he returned so often and often in his letter to this topic, that, as I have above said, I had no difficulty in comprehending the influences under which he wrote. He reminded me that there were ample funds awaiting my pleasure at his army-agents to bear my expenses to India; and he besought that I would not suffer any unnecessary delay to occur ere fulfilling my promise of joining him at *Madras*.

"Alas!" I said to myself when I had perused this letter in the solitude of my own chamber, to which I retired for the purpose, "what did poor *Eustace* think when he received that epistle of mine which broke off our engagement? It must have reached his hand just one month after he had written this. Oh! must he not fancy that my heart is unfaithful to him? But no, no: he cannot—he does not: he knows me too well, and he himself is too generous—too confiding—too trustful! He appreciates all the purity and delicacy of my motives—he sees that from the very instant I became acquainted with the

injunctions of his deceased father's will, I could not act otherwise than I have done! But in one month more—at the end of November—will the answer to that letter of mine come! He has not been recalled from India by his father's death: as a younger son it was doubtless deemed unnecessary for him to return to England on that account. There were no family affairs demanding his intervention; and doubtless his mother has only been too glad to keep him in that remote clime, in the expectation that with a prolonged absence his love for me would subside, and at length become extinct. No: he has not been invited to return to England on account of his father's death: but will that letter of mine bring him back? Will he speed homeward, reckless of all consequences, in the hope that his presence and the persuasions he may use will alter my resolve?—or will he only write? One short month will show—But, Ah! it will be a long month—yes, a long one for *me*, who must endure so much suspense!"

Such was the tenour of my reflections after perusing *Eustace Quentin's* letter. I felt altogether very unhappy. Still as firmly convinced as ever of the imperative nature of the *one* duty which I had to perform—namely, to persist in preventing *Eustace* from proving disobedient to the injunctions of his late father,—I nevertheless trembled when I reflected what might be the consequence of a meeting, if in a moment of grief and despair he should have quitted *Madras* for the purpose of returning to England. How could I resist the entreaties, the prayers, the remonstrances—perhaps even the reproaches, he would address to me? Ah! it would prove a sad and sorrowful ordeal indeed: and as if even *then* feeling that it was certain to take place, I already began to pray to heaven for strength and fortitude to nerve me in adhering to that course which my own conscience told me was strictly consistent with my duty.

When I rejoined *Laura* in the drawing-room, she saw that I was unhappy and that I had been weeping. With a truly sisterly kindness and sympathy, she besought me to reveal to her the source of my affliction; and feeling that she had a right to my confidence, I told her everything which regarded *Eustace Quentin* and myself—assuring her at the same time that if I had not long ago made those revelations, it was only because I had carefully abstained from breathing in her ears aught that might move her generous heart to be pained on my account. It was now her turn to console with me—now her turn to administer consolation and solace,—which she did, with the same tender endearment and the same caressing fondness as if she were indeed a sister!

A few days after the receipt of *Captain Quentin's* letter, *Jemima* called at the house and asked to see me. I happened to be in my own chamber at the time, and had her conducted up there to me. She was unaccompanied by the children on this occasion; and her looks denoted a considerable degree of tribulation—so that I immediately saw something was wrong. I made her sit down, and asked her in the kindest tone what was the matter?—for I had always liked this young woman, because she possessed a naturally good heart and perfectly correct principles.

"You know," she said, "that *Charles*"—alluding

to her lover—"is in the employment of Mr. Wenlock, the fashionable solicitor. Well, Mr. Wenlock had taken a great fancy to him—entrusted him with many confidential commissions—and had promised that his salary should be raised just about this time. Indeed, it appeared quite certain that this would be done. So I gave Lady Oldcastle a month's warning a few days ago; and Charles has already taken such a sweet pretty little cottage, a mile from here—and we were going to see about furnishing it at once, so as to have everything ready for the twelfth of next month which is fixed for our wedding. And now—would you believe it?—Charles spoke to Mr. Wenlock yesterday about the promised rise in his salary, candidly admitting to him that he was going to get married: when old Mr. Hobday, the managing clerk, put in such an ill word that Mr. Wenlock turned quite cool towards poor Charles, telling him he had quite enough salary for the present, and that as for marrying there was plenty of time to think of *that* when he had the certainty of being able to keep a wife. Wasn't it cruel and unfeeling?"

Jemima burst into tears: I said all I possibly could to console her—but it was some time before she grew sufficiently calm to continue the narrative of her grievances.

"It isn't so much for the disappointment about the increase of salary," she said, still half-sobbing; "although for new-married people, beginning the world and laying out their all to commence house-keeping, five shillings a-week makes a great difference. It's thirteen pounds a-year, and that's just the rent of the cottage we have taken; and as Charles has got an agreement for three years, he can't give it up. But as I was saying, that doesn't matter so much, because we could be as economical and frugal as possible and make all ends meet: but the thing that vexes us both is that old Hobday is evidently trying to undermine poor Charles in his employer's estimation. You see, this Hobday has held a confidential post for a great many years; and he is jealous of Charles on account of the favour shown him by Mr. Wenlock. From what Charles tells me, Mr. Wenlock is almost entirely under the thumb of Mr. Hobday, and makes it a rule to follow his advice: so that if this nasty crabbed old man takes a settled hatred against poor Charles,—so far from having his salary raised, he may lose his situation altogether: for Mr. Wenlock is rather a capricious kind of man. I can assure you, Mary, it has thrown quite a damp upon our spirits; and it has made me so miserable I was determined to come and consult you about it."

"My poor Jemima," I said, "most sincerely and unfeignedly do I sympathize with you: indeed I am truly distressed to think that those prospects of happiness which but a few days back appeared so bright, should have been so suddenly dimmed. But you must hope for the best. My own experience tells me, my dear friend, that it will not do in this world to be cast down by the first stroke of calamity. Mr. Hunter, your intended husband, must do his best to avoid giving any cause for this ill-natured Mr. Hobday to vent his spite upon him. Mr. Wenlock has evidently been much prepossessed in your admirer's favour; and if he be thus ready to appreciate true merit, he cannot be altogether a bad man. I do not think that this need prevent

you from marrying on the day fixed; and even if it should come to the worst, and Mr. Hunter were to lose his situation or be driven by petty tyranny to resign it, he would no doubt soon obtain another."

"Ah! that may not be so easy," ejaculated Jemima; "and it would not do to enter the married life with such a bad prospect. Much as I love Charles," she added, sobbing,—"*and* dearly as I long to become his wife, yet I would sooner continue to toil in service and save up more money, than take a precipitate step which should plunge us both into embarrassments—perhaps poverty."

"Oh! you must not speak in so hopeless a manner," said I, doing my best to cheer the poor young woman's spirits. "I have some money which I do not want, and which is entirely at your service. Indeed, it would afford me pleasure if you were to accept its use. I can let you have fifty or a hundred—"

"Ever kind—ever generous-hearted!" ejaculated Jemima, with fresh tears pouring from her eyes. "But, no—I do not need any assistance now, my dear kind friend. We have ample for our present wants: it is of the future I was thinking. However, you have spoken in so encouraging a manner, and with so much kind feeling have you bade me hope, that I already feel quite encouraged. No—I will not give way to despondency; and I am sure that when I see Charles presently, and he beholds me smile again, he will be cheered likewise. One thing you must promise me, dear Mary—indeed you have already promised me, you know—that you will honour the wedding with your presence."

"If you use the word *honour*, Jemima," I answered, "I shall certainly be very angry with you: for you are sure it will give me the greatest pleasure to attend on the occasion."

She thanked me with the warmest gratitude for the hope I had infused into her heart, and took her leave in a much more cheerful and trusting frame of mind than she was in when she first ascended to my chamber.

A week afterwards she called upon me again; and I was pleased to learn that notwithstanding some fresh manifestations of the managing clerk's jealousy and malignity towards Charles Hunter, Mr. Wenlock appeared to have again taken him into complete favour, and had even gone so far as to drop a hint that the promised increase of salary should shortly take place. Jemima was therefore as nearly as possible in her accustomed state of good spirits. At the expiration of another week I saw her again: she spoke still more cheerfully and hopefully—and I was still farther gratified to learn that all Mr. Hobday's endeavours to prejudice Charles Hunter in the estimation of his employer appeared to be in vain. Indeed, from what I was now informed, it seemed that the crabbed old managing clerk was himself declining in his master's favour; and that Mr. Wenlock, being, as I had suspected, a naturally well-meaning man, had begun to see through the selfish jealousy and spiteful manœuvring of his head clerk.

The month which I had foreseen would pass away so slowly—dragging its wearisome length along amidst the uneasiness of increasing suspense—at last reached its termination. It was now the end of November: and a letter might be expected from

Eustace Quentin—if not the appearance of Eustace Quentin himself! The first day of November passed—and still I was in unrelieved suspense. When the morning of the 2nd dawned—dull, cold, and misty—I said to myself as I rose from my couch, “Perhaps ere night I shall have heard from him—or I shall have seen him!” But when the usual hour for the arrival of the postman came, the well-known sharp double knock was not given at the door of the house; and from the parlour window I beheld him hurrying by outside the garden railings. I was resolved not to stir out all day, in case Captain Quentin should make his appearance. Laura was no stranger to all that was passing in my mind: I had no longer any secrets from her. She saw that I was restless—uneasy—unsettled; and she exerted herself to console, to soothe, and to cheer me. It even seemed as if now with comparative ease she threw off a portion of that languor which sat habitually upon her, in order to afford these sisterly ministrations: I say *with ease*, because in the love that she bore me, it required a less painful exertion to do something for me than if it were to do something for herself.

The hours passed on. At one o'clock luncheon was served up as usual in the breakfast parlour: but I had not the slightest appetite. We soon adjourned to the drawing-room; and Laura said, “What can we do to while away the time? I am sure you are in no mood, dearest Mary, to take your embroidery—to read—or to practise your music. But perhaps you would like the latter?—and as you have allowed me to act as your tutress on the piano——”

“No, my dear Laura,” I exclaimed, interrupting her: for I suddenly perceived that she had sunk back upon the sofa with a more than usually oppressive sensation of languor—a positive feebleness,—“you must not exert yourself any more on my account. You have already been too kind. All day yesterday and all to-day have you said and done a thousand tender and sisterly things to soothe and calm me.”

“It is my duty, as well as my inclination to behave thus towards you, dearest Mary,” she said: “for are you not regarded in the light of a sister to me?”

I was about to give a reply expressive of all I felt for the kind words she was uttering—when the door was suddenly thrown open, and the footman announced, “The Hon. Captain Quentin.”

CHAPTER CXXVII.

OUR INTERVIEW.

IN a moment we were folded in each other's arms. Did I recollect, in that first gush of rapturous feeling, that we ought only to have met as friends? that of my own accord I had broken off the engagement between us? and that I had no right to regard him any more as my lover—my admirer—my intended husband? No—Oh! no—I thought nothing of all this: I remembered naught of the resolve I had adopted—of the course I had taken! I had no thought—no feeling—no memory for any thing save the bliss of the first few moments of this meeting. And shall I for an instant affect such a

wretched prudery as to deny that the bliss which I then experienced was ineffably delicious? shall I pretend that my soul was not poured forth in the gushing fervour of the kisses which I gave back as fast and as warmly as I received them? And Eustace—was not *he* rejoiced? was not *his* delight beyond the power of language to depict? Did he not press me again and again to his heart? did he not lavish the fondest caresses? did he not murmur the tenderest and most endearing syllables in my ears?

When the first enthusiastic outpourings of rapture had taken place—and when, gently disengaging myself from the arms of Eustace, I looked around for the purpose of properly introducing him to Miss Maitland, I perceived that she had glided from the apartment,—thus with the most delicate consideration leaving us to ourselves: for she knew full well that we had much to say—many, many serious and important subjects to talk upon! Again I turned to Eustace: the heart of each of us was too full to permit our feelings to find utterance in collected language; and now we gazed upon each other in silence—but a silence that was full of ineffable rapture. Captain Quentin was just twenty-four years of age; and two years had elapsed since I had last seen him—two years since we parted on the sand-hills in the neighbourhood of Deal! During this interval he had visited the burning clime of India—he had performed two immense voyages of five months each across the ocean—and yet in no way was his personal beauty marred. That he had suffered much anxiety and care in consequence of the letter received from me, and which had brought him back to England, I could but too well conjecture, even before I learnt it all from his own lips: but whatsoever traces thereof would have otherwise been upon his countenance, were covered as it were by the somewhat browning effects of climate and weather, which gave a richer hue of health to his cheeks. Having been for so long a period on shipboard, he had suffered his hair to grow long; and the rich brown masses curled luxuriantly about his well-shaped head—while his whiskers, not large but glossy, gave a manly expression to a countenance whose features, by reason of their classic chiselling, would have otherwise seemed delicately effeminate. His handsome hazel eyes beamed with the soft lustre of pure and holy rapture, as he gazed upon me; and his lips, parting in smiles, revealed those brilliant teeth—the finest, the whitest, and the most faultlessly even that ever man possessed. He was appressed in plain clothes, his garments being those of deep mourning for his father's death: a tight-fitting frock-coat set off the slender symmetry of his shape to the fullest advantage. Nothing could be more genteelly elegant or more exquisitely prepossessing than the entire appearance of this young man in the rich treasury of whose heart my image was so adoringly enshrined.

Oh! wherefore do I thus speak of his exceeding personal beauty? wherefore do I thus dwell, in this place, and on this occasion, upon the fascinations and attractions of Eustace Quentin? and wherefore do I remind the reader of the immensity of that love which he cherished for me? It is because I should have been something less or something more than woman if I had remained insensible to his personal traits, or to the influence of his illimitable

affection. And I may add that it was with swelling emotions of mingled pride, and joy, and gratification, that I beheld him gaze on *me* with as much rapture as that in which I gazed on *him*; and his looks assured me that after a separation of two long years, he found me as prepossessing in his eyes as ever I had seemed. But all this while I had totally lost sight of the altered position in which we really stood towards each other—a position that had been changed by the letter I had written at the beginning of the year, and which had brought him back to England. Suddenly, as this recollection flashed back to my mind, I felt a cloud fall upon my countenance; and then I said to myself, “The ordeal demanding all that fortitude wherewith I have prayed heaven to endow me, is at hand!”

Eustace appeared to fathom my thoughts at once; and an expression of anxiety passed over his splendidly handsome countenance. Leading me to a seat, he placed himself by my side: and retaining one of my hands in his own, he said, in that voice of masculine melody which sounded like angels’ music in my ears, “Mary—dearest Mary, you will not—you cannot for a moment, think of repeating in words the decision which you announced in that letter!”

“Dear Eustace,” I answered,—for though making up my mind to consider him only in the light of a friend thenceforth, I could not, if my very existence had depended on it, address him otherwise than in the tenderest manner—nor could I have withdrawn my hand from the clasp in which he retained it,—“dear Eustace, you cannot blame me for what I have done.”

“Blame you—no, dear Mary! I cannot blame you!” he quickly replied: “because I am not so insensate as to be unable to appreciate the purity and excellence of your motives. You are too good to be placed amidst the inauspicious circumstances of this world,—and that very letter of yours,—although at the moment when I received it, I was driven by its contents well nigh to madness—yet did it develop your character in such a noble light that it only made me, if possible, love you more passionately, more fervidly, than ever! I always knew, Mary, that your heart was a treasure the possession of which ought to render me the proudest and the happiest of men; but when I found it exhibiting its magnanimity in a phase so striking—in a manner soaring so high above the selfishness of earthly beings—I vowed that sooner than resign the possession of such a heart, I would trample upon ten thousand injunctions left upon ten thousand death-beds! Oh, Mary,” he continued, vehemently and passionately, “do not look thus solemnly and reproachfully upon me, as if I had uttered an impiety and a blasphemy against the memory of my deceased father!”

“But you must recollect, dear Eustace—*dearest Eustace*,” I said, gently and murmuringly—for my heart was filled with the tenderest emotions, and my fortitude was ebbing away—“that he *was* your father—that he is no more—that it was his right as well as his duty to provide for your welfare—”

“No, no, Mary,—this is sophistry,” he interrupted me with renewed vehemence; “and you are too sensible, as well as too just and good, to make use of it. A father has a right to study his son’s happiness—but no right to seal his misery. And will

not my misery be sealed—yes, stamped beyond redemption,—if I lose you? You know how I love you—you know that all my hopes of earthly happiness are centred in you. Do you require fresh proofs of this devoted love of mine?—Oh! interrupt me not,—let me afford them—let me proclaim them! The moment I received your letter I flew to the Governor of Madras—I showed it him—besought him to give me permission to return to England. He could not—he dared not: it was against the rules of the service—for I had only been a little more than a year in India, and unless on the plea of shattered health I could not possibly obtain leave of absence. That plea I was too honourable to advance, because it would have been untrue. What course, then, did I adopt? I threw up my commission; and in a moment did I become a civilian. Yes, Mary—I am no longer in the army: and this step did I at once take in order that I might speed back to England. Oh, that long, long voyage of five months—methought it was interminable! But the moment I arrived in London, whom did I first seek? to whose presence did I fly? Not to my mother—not to her who brought me into this world: but to *you*, darling of my heart—to *you*, the only joy of my soul,—to *you* did I fly! And now, Mary, is all this love of mine to remain unrecompensed? is it to go unrewarded?”

Eustace Quentin had spoken with a vehement rapidity—with the very frenzy of passion: his language and his looks showed me, if I had required such proof, how dear I was to him, and how solemnly and sacredly true was his avowal that all his hopes of happiness were centred in me. The tears were raining down my cheeks: there was a continuous gush of indescribable emotions from the very foundations of my heart. I strove to speak—but my feelings choked the power of utterance; and throwing my arms about his neck, I laid my head upon his shoulder and sobbed convulsively.

“Oh! Mary, Mary,” he murmured, now speaking in the low and broken accents which indicated the depth of his own emotions, as well as the fears that were inspired in his heart by my terrible grief: “you cannot—you will not—adhere to a decision which must plunge us both into the depths of wretchedness? I know that you love me; and judging your feelings by mine, I know likewise it is nothing short of self-destruction on your part to think of an eternal separation. Mary, Mary, relent—reflect—re-call that decision, I beseech—I implore—I conjure you. Good heavens!”—and now his accents thrilled forth again in higher tones, like the sudden swell of a wild but mournful music,—“it is suicide for yourself—it is death to me—this thought of separation on your part! Dearer—Oh, far dearer to me than ever are *you*!—yes, dearer, if possible, since I have known this new phase in your character, and have received the conviction of your readiness at self-martyrdom to a sense of duty—but, Oh! a most mistaken one! And I come back to England, too, to find you more exquisitely beautiful, if possible, than when we parted two years back—And to resign you, admirable being that you are—lovely and adorable creature that you seem in my eyes—no, no—it is impossible—and you cannot pronounce such a doom!”

“Dear Eustace,” I said, slowly raising my head



from his shoulder—and slowly also withdrawing myself at the same time from the fervid embrace in which he had strained me,—“this is a subject which we must discourse upon tranquilly and calmly: it must not be pleaded in passion. Listen to me, my beloved Eustace—listen for a little while—and do not interrupt me. Not for a moment am I insensible of all the proofs of love which you have afforded me throughout our engagement. That you should have ever offered me your hand in the first instance, was the greatest and the noblest proof of all: for never shall I forget that I was *then* but an obscure and humble girl—in a menial position—and that all the usages of society, all the conventionalisms of the sphere in which you move, were opposed to such an alliance. When you came of age you might have inherited the large fortune left you by your uncle, if you had renounced me—and you would not! You have thrown up your commission—you have all in a moment abandoned an honour-

able profession in order to fly to me—yes, and you have flown to me before even seeking your widowed mother, who is in mourning for your father's death! All these proofs of love, Eustace, are as unquestionable and as apparent as if an angel came down from heaven to reveal to me the secrets of your heart. Think you, then, that I am unmindful of the immensity of your love? And on my side I love you, dearest Eustace, with a depth of feeling that in itself is a worship and an adoration! Think you, therefore, that it costs me not the cruellest pangs—the most heartfelt excruciations—yes, the most poignant agonies, to contemplate the necessity which bids me renew in words the decision which ten months back, amidst scalding tears, I committed to writing? Pray do not interrupt me, Eustace—I beseech you to listen calmly and attentively. Your father, on his death-bed, decreed solemnly that you must not lead to the altar a bride possessing a dower of less than thirty

thousand pounds. I am no such bride for you: I am portionless, and have no chance of ever being otherwise. But this is not all. How stand your own circumstances? You are no longer in the army: you are without an income. Yet there is a fortune which you can obtain if you adopt a particular course; and this is, that you must repair to your mother—you must give her ladyship the solemn assurance that everything is at an end between yourself and me—and she will not be cruel enough to insist that you should go to such an extreme as to marry *another*, ere she will put you in possession of your inheritance."

"Enough, Mary—enough!" ejaculated Eustace. "It is but a mere money consideration; and you cannot do me such injustice—you cannot think me so base, so vile, so mercenary——"

"For heaven's sake speak not thus, dearest Eustace," I interrupted him: "for you know that I am incapable of accusing you in this manner. But it is not a mere money consideration. If it were—and if it were nothing more—I should not for a moment hesitate—Oh, not for a single moment should I hesitate to give you this hand and say it is your own! But there is a loftier, and at the same time a still more sacred and solemn consideration. It is *this*: that your father left certain injunctions upon his death-bed—Oh! I have read them—my memory retains them, every line—every word—every syllable—they are branded upon that memory as if with a red-hot iron! Did he not say that he delivered those injunctions when he felt his end approaching—that he was deeply imbued with the solemnity of the circumstances in which he dictated them? did he not earnestly beseech and implore, as well as positively command and enjoin, that you would not contract such an alliance as that with me would prove? and did he not record those dreadful words, that if you contravened his instructions you would be violating the last dying wishes of your father—that you would be guilty of an act of flagrant disobedience, and one which would be in defiance of his memory? Oh, Eustace! what can *you* do? what can *I* do in the presence of such injunctions as those?"

"I have listened, Mary, in silence and with attention," he replied, "because you wished it—because you enjoined it; but not the less was I impatient to give you my answer. It is *this*: that never can I be persuaded that my father had the right to mark out for me a destiny which stamps my wretchedness. Oh! do not for a moment think that I am unmindful of the respect and duty which I owe to the memory of my deceased parent. I have shed tears for his death—I have mourned him—I have deplored him: and had he enjoined me any possible sacrifice short of this one, I should have fulfilled it—yes, I should have fulfilled it! But *this one*—no, no, Mary; it is impossible—it is impossible!"

Thus speaking, again with wild accents and almost frenzied looks, Eustace threw himself at my feet—took my hand—pressed it to his lips—and covered it with kisses—yes, and with tears too. Oh! it cut me to the very soul—it was like a barbed arrow penetrating to my heart, thus to behold him weep; and again did my own tears fall thick and fast. But still was I armed with sufficient fortitude to perform that duty which I felt to be imperious—

which I knew to be paramount. Oh! it was a horrible self-martyrdom indeed!—it was a hideous sacrifice that I had to make—a sacrifice of a whole life's happiness! My heart was rent in twain—mortal agonies were excruciating me to the uttermost confines of my being: it was into the abyss of blackest, darkest, deepest woe in which I was plunging myself—in which I was plunging *him* too: and yet the appalling deed had to be done! Mine was a veritable crucifixion of the feelings which no power of language can describe.

"Rise, my adored Eustace—rise," I said, bending down and kissing him unasked: "rise, my own well-beloved—it is not for you to kneel to me: it is for me to kneel to you, and beseech that you will invoke heaven to give you strength of mind both to make and endure this tremendous sacrifice. Perhaps the Almighty will not doom us to misery throughout our lives!"—and yet as I uttered these words, there was the deep and harrowing conviction in my mind that I was suggesting a hope in the presence of despair—fancying the existence of a ray in the midst of a night of darkest, blackest gloom.

Eustace Quentin rose slowly, his features expressive of a rigid despair. Oh! I could not endure that look of utter mournfulness which he bent upon me: my tears gushed forth anew; and at the moment I wished—it was a horrible, hideous wish—that death would strike us simultaneously then and there.

"Mary," said Eustace, resuming his seat by my side; and his voice was so changed—Oh, so changed into sepulchral lowness, that it made my blood run cold to hear it,—"is your resolve taken? are you determined?"

"You will not think the less of my love if I still answer *yes*,"—and heaven alone can tell the mighty effort it cost me to give this response, and the harrowing intenseness of feeling with which it was accompanied.

He did not immediately reply, but gazed upon me in a sort of bewildered vacancy, as if the stupor of consternation were upon him and he knew not whether he had heard and understood me aright. He spake no word—he heaved no sigh: an ashy paleness grew upon his countenance—his eyes were set—and his lips, now ashy as his face, were slightly apart, but perfectly motionless. I was suddenly seized with a wild terror: methought that his senses were abandoning him—that his reason was affected; and for a moment a bitter pang, like that of remorse, shot through my heart, smiting me as if I, and I alone, were the cause of all this. I seized his hand: it was so cold that it sent the chillness of death quivering and shivering through my entire frame. I pressed it to my lips, crying, "Eustace, dearest Eustace—my more than life—speak to me—why do you gaze thus?"

All in an instant there was a wild and terrific outburst of passionate grief on his part: the tears poured from his eyes—he wrung his hands in despair—and then, covering his countenance with them, he gave way to such deep convulsive sobs that it seemed as if there were an internal struggle between the two antagonistic principles of life and death. It was now my turn to fall at his feet,—my turn to kneel to *him*; and in bitterest anguish I implored and besought that he would be calm. But still he continued to weep and sob as if it were a woman's

heart in the strong form of a man that was thus breaking with the death-throes of ruined hopes. In this condition he remained for some minutes—a condition of such intense suffering that several times a word was quivering upon my lips ready to be spoken—a word that would annihilate the decision to which I had previously come, and which would proclaim that the sense of duty was destroyed. But at length he grew comparatively tranquillized, so far as to hush his sobs and find utterance for his feelings in the most impassioned language of endearment and grief. The terrible crisis was past: and somewhat cheered and comforted, I rose from my knees, resuming my seat by his side.

“Mary,” he said, in almost an imploring tone, “is not this some fearful nightmare of the imagination from which I must soon awake? or is it a reality? Oh, my God! it is a reality—and may that God whose name I have just invoked, give me strength to endure it!”

“He will, he will, Eustace,” I said with mingled earnestness and excitement: “if we both perform that which we believe to be our duty, heaven will strengthen us to endure whatsoever pangs the sacrifice may cost. It has hitherto been so with me. When on former occasions we have been compelled to separate, I have found that there was a self-supporting power in the consciousness of the rectitude of the deed. And it will be so now.”

“O Mary, you speak like an angel!” exclaimed Eustace; “and am I to lose you, angel that you thus are! But tell me frankly and candidly, Mary—would you yourself feel unhappy if you accompanied me to the altar under existing circumstances?”

“I should, dear Eustace—I should,” was my impressive answer. “I should feel as if I were committing a crime myself, and leading you into the commission of one also. I should expect that our existence would be haunted by the reflection of your father’s memory desecrated—of his dying injunctions disobeyed: I should dread lest his posthumous curse would follow us!”

“Is it indeed so?” said Eustace slowly and deliberately—for the storm of excitement and passion was now passed: then, as he gazed upon me with a most mournful tenderness, he added, “Yes—you are right, Mary: unless you can accompany me under the happiest circumstances to the altar your own existence would prove a miserable one, and it would fill me with despair—it would crush and overwhelm me—or rather it would kill me by inches, to behold your beautiful cheeks growing pale, your eyes becoming dimmed, your lovely form wasting away! But, Ah!” he suddenly ejaculated, “there is hope, Mary—there is yet hope! Yes: heaven be thanked, there is hope!”—and it was with a wild and thrilling exultation that he thus spoke.

I gazed upon him in astonishment, which deepened into joy and delight to perceive that his mood had thus quickly changed, and that through the hitherto rayless depth of a night of despair his imagination had caught sight of a glimmering of hope.

“Yes, dear Mary,” he repeated, more vehemently and more enthusiastically than before, “there is hope. Your decision is but conditional: it is founded only on the injunctions of my deceased father. But if you possessed thirty thousand pounds,

you would marry me, dear Mary—would you not?”

“Oh! need you ask, my beloved Eustace?” I exclaimed: but the next moment the agonizing thought again swept like a whirlwind through my brain, that his reason had become unsettled: for what hope was there that I could ever become possessed of such a fortune as that?

“Then our happiness,” he cried, “depends upon thirty thousand pounds! Suppose, Mary—that I obtain it—suppose that I acquire it by dint of honest industry—suppose that when it is so acquired, I bring it all to you—I place it in your hands—I give it to you—I make it over to you—I tell you that it is yours,—then, in that case, will you accompany me to the altar?”

I was too much excited by the scene which had taken place to reflect at the moment that such a proceeding on the part of Eustace, even if realized, would be scarcely a proper carrying-out of his father’s instructions, but rather an equivocal evasion of them, inasmuch as they were to the effect that the bride whom he might lead to the altar should possess thirty thousand pounds of her own legitimate fortune;—I did not, I say, pause to reflect on all this—my mind was too excited, my feelings wrought up to too high and painful a pitch;—and moreover, both for the sake of Eustace and my own, I was glad to catch at any straw of hope that might be floating past on the dark waters of our destiny. Therefore I at once and hurriedly exclaimed, “Yes, my own well-beloved—I will promise all you have asked!”

“Then, darling Mary, there is hope—there is hope!” he ejaculated: and again snatching me to his breast, he lavished upon me the tenderest caresses.

For a few minutes his joy was as wild and exultant as his grief had ere now been excruciating and profound; and some little while elapsed ere he could give me the least word of explanation in respect to the plans that had suddenly taken shape and substance in his mind. At length he said, “But as yet you know not what I mean: I will tell you, dearest. Henry Crawford has accompanied me to England—”

An ejaculation of joy burst from my lips; and for a moment I forgot my own suspense and anxiety in the thought that my beloved friend Sybilla was at length happy.

“Ah, I understand that delight on your part,” said Eustace: “for in your recent letters you informed me how accident had brought you in contact with Henry Crawford’s Sybilla. Well, dearest, the same ship which brought me your last letter—that letter which made me fly from Madras—likewise brought the most welcome intelligence to Henry Crawford. It was a letter from a solicitor in London, telling him that by the death of a distant relative—”

“I know it all, dearest Eustace: he has become a rich man—and I am unfeignedly rejoiced for his dear Sybilla’s sake.”

“I beheld their meeting just now,” said Eustace: “for Henry Crawford, I repeat, accompanied me home from India. The ship arrived in the Downs in the middle of last night—we landed together without delay at Deal—and we took a post-chaise to London. We drove straight to Sunbeam Villa,

where I expected to find you; and it was there I learnt that you were here, as the friend and adopted sister of Miss Maitland. And this Miss Maitland is the niece of the deceased lady whose wealth Henry Crawford inherits! How strange are all these coincidences! But still I have not explained the meaning of that hope which now fills my breast. Mary," he continued, more seriously, "it is true, as you are now expressed yourself, that I am without an income: but in Henry Crawford I possess a very dear friend. On the voyage homeward I explained to him how I was situated in consequence of my father's dying instructions; and I showed him the letter which you had written me. My generous friend offered me the use of his purse. He will lend me a few thousand pounds: with those I will at once embark in commercial enterprises. Knowing full well the nature of the commodities which obtain a ready sale and realize immense returns, I will freight a ship for one of the oriental ports where there is an opening for such trade. Oh! if fortune should smile upon me—and I feel that it will!—we may hope in a couple of years, dearest Mary, to possess the amount which will make us happy."

I was too inexperienced at that time in business matters, and in the nature of mercantile transactions or trading speculations, to perceive that Eustace Quentin was much too sanguine in the hopes which he thus formed; and, as I have already said, I was too unhappy, both on his account and my own, not to clutch at any straw. Need I confess that it was a source of infinite relief to my mind to think that our engagement need not be altogether broken off—but that its fulfilment was merely to be postponed? While there is life there is hope: and while the life of love endures, there is hope also. And I was prepared to encourage this hope, and stimulate the purposes on which it was based, all the more earnestly because I saw that it had suddenly endowed my beloved Eustace with the requisite fortitude to consent to a postponement of our marriage until such time as it could be accomplished without the flagrant violation of his father's dying injunctions. I was therefore rejoiced at the plans he had detailed to me; and when he saw that I entered so fully into their spirit, he rapidly acquired an increased cheerfulness.

We then began to converse more serenely and tranquilly than we had hitherto been able. I told him in detail all that had occurred in respect to Sybilla; and he assured me that during the voyage from India a most extraordinary change had taken place in Henry Crawford's mind. The intelligence which he had received, enabling him to throw up his commission in the army, as Eustace had done, and return at once to England, had suddenly lifted him up from the depths of despondency—and, dispelling the clouds of morbid foreboding and gloomy presentiment, had elevated him to the light of a higher and more glowing atmosphere. He had revealed to Eustace the secret of his marriage with Sybilla: and during the entire voyage home, he laid plans for the future happiness of his wife and himself. Eustace repeated what he had just now said in respect to their meeting at Sunbeam Villa,—adding that it was only exceeded in rapturous endearment by our own meeting, two hours back, beneath that roof where we thus conversing.

Yes: two hours had already elapsed since the first moment that Eustace and I flew into each other's arms!—two hours which had carried us through so many varied phases of feeling, and at the expiration of which I had indeed so little expected that we should be conversing cheerfully with fresh hopes in our hearts. But now we had to touch upon another painful topic. Eustace himself broached it: and he did so with anxiety and foreboding gloom, for he more than half anticipated what my response would be.

"Without delay, darling Mary," he said, "am I about to embark in commercial enterprises. I will accept the use of ten thousand pounds from Henry Crawford. With this sum, judiciously laid out, immense profits may be realized in the space of two years. But during this interval—for I myself shall not accompany my own vessel—"

"During that interval, Eustace," I replied firmly, "we must not see each other: or if so, but once or twice. You can understand my motives. There will be hope in our hearts—and that will sustain our fortitude. But if, my own well-beloved," I added, my voice becoming uncontrollably mournful, "that hope should be doomed to disappointment in the long run, and the frightful barrier which the late Lord Wilberton's injunctions have raised up should remain insurmountable,—then will the necessity of an eternal separation be accompanied by the lesser pangs. For your sake and for mine, dear Eustace, we must remain apart. Oh! need I tell you how bitter is this self-inflicted punishment—this self-imposed sacrifice? But still it is better we should separate under the more cheering circumstances which now surround us, than in the utter blankness of despair which an hour back appeared to be our lot."

"I have always yielded to your wishes, Mary," replied Eustace, firmly yet mournfully; "for I have ever known that they were based upon discretion and prudence. I will not refuse obedience to them now. But you have promised that we shall meet on two or three occasions during the interval which must elapse ere our hopes be realized: and this is a consolation. Besides, you will permit me to write to you occasionally, to explain the progress of my affairs: and that will be another solace. Nor will it be the least cheering reflection that we are no longer divided by immense oceans, and that in case of any emergency, a short hour or two may bring us together. And now, dearest Mary, let me sympathize with you for the death of your brother: for during the few minutes that I remained in conversation with your warm-hearted friends, Mrs. Summerly and Mrs. Crawford, I was given to understand that I should find you in mourning, and was likewise informed of the cause."

"Dear Eustace," I answered, weeping, "from you I have no secrets:"—and then I entered into explanations relative to the unfortunate career of my deceased brother; and I also told him how afflicted I was on behalf of my erring sister Sarah. He was profoundly shocked as he listened to the latter narrative: but he consoled with me in the tenderest and most endearing manner. I assured him that on the other hand I experienced considerable comfort in the excellent dispositions of William and Jane; and as he shared in the sources of my sorrow, so did his looks brighten up as he heard me

speak in such glowing terms of that admirable brother and affectionate young sister.

"And now, Eustace," I said, assuming as cheerful a look as possible, and caring him of my own accord, "since you are so good as to agree to all my conditions—and that when you take leave of me presently, it must be for several months—I do not mean to hurry you away. Heaven forbid!" I added fervently: "and therefore you must pass the remainder of the day here. I know that my dear friend Laura will be delighted to welcome you. She knows all my secrets; and I will go and tell her everything that has taken place between us. You have no objection?"

"Oh, none, dearest Mary!" exclaimed Eustace, overjoyed at my promise that he should pass the rest of the day at the house. "Go to Miss Maitland at once. But mind and not be long: for every minute will appear an hour that you are away from me."

I hastened to the apartment to which Laura had retired, and communicated everything that had passed. She was unfeignedly delighted to learn that Eustace Quentin entertained such sanguine hopes as to the future: but with regard to their ultimate realization she was no better able to prognosticate than I myself was. She accompanied me to the drawing-room, where I had left Eustace; and giving him her hand, welcomed him most cordially to the house.

"Mary," she said, "has already asked you to stay to dinner, Captain Quentin; and I have the greatest pleasure in supporting the invitation."

"You must not think the worse of me, Miss Maitland," he said, after due acknowledgments for her kindness, "that I so readily and joyously accept this invitation to pass the remainder of the day here, instead of at once repairing to Piccadilly to see my mother and brother. But—" and he looked with tender meaning upon me.

"Oh! I understand perfectly," said Laura, smiling: "and you may rest assured I do not consider you to be so very, very undutiful."

And Eustace did remain for the rest of that day; and we both appeared, as if by a tacit though well-understood convention, to give ourselves up as much as possible to the happiness of the present, banishing from our minds to the extent of our power whatsoever cares there might be for the future. But when the moment of separation came, and between ten and eleven o'clock in the evening Eustace rose to take his leave, the looks which we at the moment exchanged showed that our hearts were full of sorrowful emotions. Miss Maitland assured Captain Quentin that whenever, under existing circumstances, he called at that house, he would always experience the most cordial welcome: and she added emphatically, that every one in whom I was interested must be regarded as a friend of her's. Eustace again expressed due acknowledgments: and then came our farewell embrace. Miss Maitland left us to ourselves for the last few minutes that we were to be together; and we said all we could to inspire mutual consolation and fortitude. We parted—and when the door closed behind the retreating form of my beloved Eustace, it seemed as if a veil had once more fallen before my eyes to shut out the hope of eventual happiness.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

JEMIMA AND HER LOVER.

On the following day,—as I had fully expected,—Mrs. Summerly, Sybilla, and Henry Crawford called at the house: for the young lady was naturally anxious to introduce her husband to both Laura and myself—especially to me, who had been her confidante throughout so many trying scenes. Mr. Crawford was now a little more than twenty-seven years of age; and he was as strikingly handsome as his miniature-portrait had represented him. His countenance still wore a slight expression of melancholy: but this was its natural cast—for he was in the best possible spirits; and Sybilla took an opportunity of whispering in my ear that both he and herself had come to an agreement to banish all gloomy forebodings in future, and to accept with thankfulness the happy change which had been accomplished in their fortunes.

Mr. Crawford surveyed me with the most friendly interest, and treated me in a similar spirit. Indeed, with a kind-hearted and manly frankness, he said that he did not mean to regard me as a stranger: for he could scarcely feel that this was a first acquaintance, as he had already heard so much concerning me from others. As for Mrs. Summerly, her countenance, naturally good-humoured, was perfectly radiant with smiles;—and Laura was herself inspired into something bordering upon cheerfulness by beholding the happiness of her visitors. And what of Sybilla? Oh! need I say that she experienced a delight—an ecstasy of feeling—which more than compensated for every pang of suffering which she had endured? But because I myself was so much less fortunate in the circumstances of my own love, I was not jealous of my friend Sybilla's happiness: although throughout that day I frequently caught myself sighing, while the saddening thought would steal into my soul that *her* position with Henry Crawford was very different indeed from *mine* in respect to Eustace!

They remained to dinner with Laura and me; and in the evening Sybilla informed me that in compliance with Mrs. Summerly's earnest request, she and her husband were to reside at Sunbeam Villa. She moreover informed me that her father had called there on the previous evening, and had behaved with far more kindness than she had expected towards Mr. Crawford. But it appeared that through the honourable and liberal measures taken by Mr. Appleton, Mr. Trevanion's affairs were becoming rapidly brighter; and this circumstance had naturally tended to smooth down much of his past irritability, as well as to compensate him somewhat for his disappointment in respect to the marriage he had arranged for his daughter with Mr. Woodville.

A few days afterwards I received a letter from Eustace Quentin. He commenced by observing that he was sure I should not think he was writing to me too soon, as there were so many points on which I must be anxious to receive information. He then proceeded to give me a long and detailed account of his interview with his mother and brother. They were astonished to behold him in

England, not having received the slightest intimation of his purpose to leave the East Indies. He plainly and frankly avowed that he had taken so precipitate a step in consequence of a letter which he had received from me: but when he farther stated that he had thrown up his commission in the army, and intended to devote himself to mercantile pursuits, both Lady Wilberton and his brother overwhelmed him with reproaches. He endeavoured to reason calmly and deliberately with them: but they would not hear him. They accused him of disgracing the name which he bore, by the whole tenour of his conduct; and vowed that unless he proved in every way submissive to their will, they would discard him altogether. The interview was a most painful one: Lady Wilberton would not be softened—while the young Lord Wilberton displayed a most rancorous malignity against his poor brother. Eustace accordingly left the house with the mournful reflection that it was not a home for him, and even in the mere light of a formal visitor must he thenceforth consider himself excluded! But though bitterly feeling the unnatural treatment he had thus experienced at the hands of his mother and brother, Eustace was not down-hearted. On the contrary, he had not merely obtained the loan of ten thousand pounds from Mr. Crawford; but another circumstance had occurred, tending to cheer him on in the course which he was entering. The old porter at Wilberton House had put into his hand a letter as he was taking his departure; and this letter, when he subsequently opened it, was found to contain an intimation that if in the course of a few days he would call at Messrs. Coutts's bank, he would receive something which would be left there for him. This letter, so mysteriously worded, was written in a female hand, evidently disguised, and without any signature appended. He scarcely knew what to think of it; and yet he had his suspicions in respect to who his unknown and generous friend might prove to be: but he resolved to take no immediate notice of the anonymous communication until he had called at the bank. This visit he paid on the same morning that he wrote to me. It appeared that on announcing his name, he was shown into the manager's private room at the bank; and was informed that a friend who wished him well, had placed five thousand pounds at his disposal, to aid him in certain commercial enterprises which it was known he was about to undertake. Ah! *then* were the suspicions of Eustace confirmed; and he felt convinced that his benefactress who had conducted this matter with so much delicacy and secrecy, was none other than Laura Maitland, and that it was for my sake she had rendered him so munificent a service. But the manager at the bank would give him no positive information on the point,—merely smiling at his questions, and leaving him to surmise whatsoever he chose. Eustace proceeded to request of me, that if I had any means of corroborating his conjecture—or rather of establishing the truth of his opinion that Laura Maitland was indeed his benefactress—I was to present her with a letter which he had enclosed in the one addressed to me. That letter he had purposely left unsealed, that I might read its contents. He then went on to inform me that, possessed as he now was of so large a capital as fifteen thousand pounds, his hopes of speedy success in all

his views were more sanguine than ever. He had been advised to repair to Liverpool for the purpose of chartering and freighting a ship; and that no time might be lost, he purposed to set off at once. I was therefore to write to him at the post-office at Liverpool; and in a few days he would send me his precise address in that town.

The pain which all the first portion of this letter caused me to experience,—that portion, I mean, which described his interview with his mother and brother,—was greatly mitigated by the cheering intelligence contained in the latter part. For not only did this latter part of the epistle reveal to me the noble deed which had evidently been performed by Laura Maitland through her friendship for me,—but it likewise showed that Eustace was in good spirits, and full of hope with regard to the realization of the project he had undertaken. Altogether, the clouds which for some months back had so darkly obscured the heaven of my happiness, were beginning to lose somewhat of that murky gloom; and in the horizon there was a glimmering light which seemed to herald the dawn of a brighter day for us both. Oh, generous-hearted Laura! how deeply in the solitude of my chamber did I feel the full sense of her kindness, ere I proceeded to the drawing-room to present her with the letter which Eustace had enclosed in my own. That letter was couched in terms of warmest but most respectful gratitude: it was precisely such a letter which a well-bred young gentleman should have written to a young lady under those peculiar circumstances.

I found Laura reclining upon the sofa; and throwing my arms around her neck, I covered her cheeks with kisses. She knew that I had received a letter within the hour that was passing; and she therefore was at no loss to imagine the cause of my present emotions. She did not affect ignorance on the point; and when I poured forth all the gratitude I felt, she gently acknowledged that she had adopted those means of proving the sincere sisterly regard she experienced towards me. I gave her Captain Quentin's letter; and when she had read it, she embraced me in her turn, saying, "Dearest Mary, it would prove the happiest day which could possibly mark the remainder of my life, were I to behold this excellent young gentleman conduct you to the altar. Most sincerely shall I pray that his laudable endeavours to struggle against adverse circumstances, may be crowned with success. But you look mournful, Mary: a shade has suddenly passed over your countenance—"

"My dear Laura," I answered, "you are acquainted with the precise tenour of those injunctions left by the late Lord Wilberton—"

"Ah! I comprehend what troubles you," she exclaimed: "but I must reason with you, Mary, upon that subject. While admiring all the self-denial which you have manifested towards Captain Quentin on account of his deceased father's instructions, yet I *do* think it possible to carry this punctiliousness to an extreme. If Captain Quentin shall succeed in acquiring the requisite sum—that is to say, in doubling his present capital,—and if he shall place the whole amount in your hands, I think that you would be wrong to hesitate any longer to become his wife. Not for a moment would I counsel you to take a step at variance with your own duty, or which should lead him into flagrant disobedience

to his late father's injunctions: but I should certainly think that you would be straining a point to too great a degree of nicety, if you ultimately refused to bestow your hand upon Captain Quentin as the reward of the laudable and honourable course which he has adopted in the hope of obtaining it. Besides, Mary, it would be wrong to trifle with his happiness: it would be as wicked as it would be foolish for you to wreck the felicity of both, for the sake of a miserable punctilio. Tell me, then—promise me, my dearest Mary, that on the day when Captain Quentin places thirty thousand pounds in your hands, you will consent to accompany him to the altar."

"I will, Laura—I will," was the murmuring reply which I gave: and I must candidly confess that it was with a heartfelt thrill of pleasure I was thus enabled to yield to her kind and well-meant reasonings.

That same day I answered my beloved Eustace's letter; and the return of post brought me his reply—acquainting me with the address of the house in which he had taken lodgings, and where he would continue to reside for some weeks to come. He was already actively engaged in the necessary preliminaries for his great mercantile speculations; and he wrote in a cheerful strain.

It was as early as nine o'clock in the morning of the day following that on which I received the letter just alluded to, that Jemima called upon me in the greatest possible tribulation. I was seated alone in the breakfast-parlour at the time;—for Laura always took her morning repast in bed,—when Jemima was thus ushered into my presence. The moment the servant who introduced her had quitted the room, the poor young woman burst out into the most passionate grief; and several minutes elapsed ere I could so far tranquillize her as to elicit even the slightest word to make me aware of what had happened. Then, in broken sentences, she gave me to understand that a terrible calamity had overtaken her intended husband Charles Hunter: for that he had been robbed on the preceding night of a sum of money with which Mr. Hobday, the managing clerk, had entrusted him to convey to a nobleman residing at Hammersmith. Then Jemima relapsed into fresh convulsions of grief; and again did several minutes pass before I could succeed in obtaining the full details of the occurrence. I besought and conjured her to subdue the anguish of her feelings,—representing that this self-abandonment to despair would do no good, and that if it were possible for me to render any assistance or give any advice, the sooner I was put in possession of the whole facts, the better. This gentle remonstrance had its effect; and Jemima proceeded to give me the following explanations, although they were frequently interrupted by many convulsive sobs.

"It appears," she said, "that Lord Tottenham is a client of Mr. Wenlock; and that yesterday his lordship sent to desire an advance of a thousand pounds upon a certain security which Mr. Wenlock holds. In consequence of a press of business at the office, no one could be spared to take the money to Lord Tottenham until between nine and ten o'clock in the evening: for all the clerks were kept until that time. At length the business being over, Mr. Hobday gave Charles the thousand pounds in bank-notes and gold, to take to his lordship, bidding

him be sure and deliver the money last night before he went to his own abode. The evening was dreadfully dark; and Lord Tottenham's house stands in a very lonely situation. As poor Charles was hurrying along by the side of a dead wall, he was suddenly seized upon by two ruffians: and a desperate struggle took place. But Charles was overpowered—and one of the villains dealt him a blow with a bludgeon, or club, which stretched him senseless on the ground. When he returned to consciousness, he was alone: his pockets had been rifled—and everything they contained was gone. He hastened back to the office to report the misfortune: but Mr. Hobday and all the other clerks were gone, and Mr. Wenlock was out at a party, from which he was not expected home until a very late hour; for I must tell you that the offices are at Mr. Wenlock's own house. Charles lost no time in repairing to the station-house, and giving information of the robbery. Although the night was so dark, and there were no lamps in the spot where the outrage took place, yet he had seen enough of the two ruffians to be enabled to give some little description of them; and the police promised to take the thing in hand at once. Charles then went home, wretchedly out of spirits, as you may well suppose—and also entertaining the most serious apprehensions in respect to the construction which his employer might put upon the affair,—the more so as he foresaw that Mr. Hobday would not lose such an opportunity for displaying his rancorous hatred towards him. About an hour back, Charles called at Lady Oldcastle's—asked to see me—and then told me what had occurred. O Mary! he is most dreadfully cut up; and you may fancy how great my affliction was! Leaving the children in the care of the under-nursemaid, I walked with him a part of the way towards Mr. Wenlock's; and then feeling so thoroughly unhappy—Oh! so unhappy—I could not help coming to tell you what had occurred; and I hope you will forgive me for disturbing you at such an hour."

"Forgive you, Jemima!" I exclaimed: "do not talk in such a strain to me. You have not intruded. I only wish to heaven I had the money to give you, that Mr. Hunter might be relieved from whatsoever apprehensions he entertains. But it is impossible that Mr. Wenlock will accuse him of self-appropriating that sum!—impossible likewise that he will yield to whatsoever misrepresentations this malignant Mr. Hobday may think fit to suggest!"

"Oh! Mary," resumed Jemima, wringing her hands, and weeping bitterly, "I cannot help feeling that it is a most frightful calamity. A thousand presentiments of evil are torturing my mind. It really seems as if poor Charles was destined to be plunged into all kinds of troubles. Suppose he lost his situation, even if nothing worse happens!"—and again did Jemima become convulsed with grief.

I did my best to encourage and cheer her; and once more did she recover a certain degree of composure.

"He promised to meet me close by the office at ten o'clock," she said, "and let me know how Mr. Wenlock received the announcement."

"It is ten o'clock now," I observed, looking at my watch: then, as she sprang up from her seat to

hurry away, I said, "Come back as soon as you can, Jemima,—for I shall be most anxious to learn the result."

"I will—I will," she responded—and then quitted the room.

Although I had said all I could possibly think of to reassure the poor young woman, I could not help entertaining very serious apprehensions as to what might be the issue of the affair: but being unacquainted, even by sight, with Mr. Wenlock and Mr. Hobday, I had no means of judging of their respective characters, beyond the information I had at different times received from Jemima on the subject. I therefore saw that a great deal depended on the extent to which Hobday's malignity might reach, and of the impression which his representations would make upon the mind of Mr. Wenlock. An hour passed—and Jemima did not re-appear. I grew very uneasy: for I felt deeply on her account, and likewise on that of Mr. Hunter, who had appeared to me, on the only occasion that I saw him, a very respectable and well-behaved young man. Another hour elapsed—it was now twelve o'clock—and as I was looking from the window, I saw Jemima traversing the garden and approaching the house. The first glance that I threw upon her showed me that she was convulsed with grief; and I immediately apprehended the worst. I hastened down to the front door—opened it myself—and conducted her into the parlour; where she threw herself upon a sofa, weeping, and sobbing, and wringing her hands as if she were distracted.

"For heaven's sake, tell me, Jemima," I said, "what has happened."

"Oh! they have arrested him—he is in the hands of the police—they would not believe his tale—they will take him before a magistrate—he will be sent to prison!"

Such were the broken sentences to which the poor creature gave utterance, amidst the wildness of her affliction; and I was painfully shocked at the sad tale thus revealed to my ears. I sat down by her side—I took her hand—I represented to her that his innocence would transpire in the long run—that if he gave a feasible and consistent account of the whole transaction before the magistrate, he would not be sent to prison—and I gently reminded her that instead of giving way to an unavailing grief, she ought to collect all her fortitude and see whether she could be of any assistance to Mr. Hunter. I even offered to accompany her to the neighbourhood of the police-court, so as to ascertain the result of the examination before the magistrate: but it was a long time ere I could succeed in inducing her to struggle against the paroxysms of her affliction. Even then she talked wildly, saying that she would go alone to the Queen Square police-office—that it was her duty to be near him—that if they sent him to prison, she would go thither likewise, to console him. I represented to her that if the worst should happen, she would not be allowed to carry out her design: nor was it proper that she should;—and I concluded by saying, "If these proceedings should go farther, Jemima, it will be your duty to leave no stone unturned in your endeavour to collect proofs of his innocence. Go, if you will, to Queen Square: but I beseech you to exercise a proper control over your feelings; and come back again to let me know the result of the investigation,

so that we may deliberate what course is to be pursued."

She pressed my hand with grateful fervour—promised to follow my counsel—and took her departure. Poor creature! how deeply, how sincerely I pitied her! In three hours she returned. There was another explosion of wild and tumultuous feelings—another painful task for me to endure in my attempts to console her. But no wonder that she was thus poignantly distressed—for Charles Hunter had been remanded on the charge, and was to be brought up again in two days for final examination, with a view to his committal for trial.

"Now, Jemima," I said, when I had elicited these facts, "you must compose your feelings—it is imperiously necessary that you should curb the violence of your grief. Something must be done to assist the unfortunate young man: for unfortunate, and not guilty, I am sure he is. Tell me whatsoever particulars you have omitted to relate. Did he not make his statement in a straightforward manner? was he confused and bewildered? For innocence, when thus charged, may for the time betray all the wonted evidences of guilt."

"It was for this that the magistrate did not believe him," answered Jemima; "and because he varied in some few details from the description of the two ruffians that he gave last night at the station-house. But when questioned on that point, he explained himself to the effect that since he had been enabled to consider more deliberately over the impressions which the appearance of those men made upon him at the time, he had recollected things which in the hurry and excitement of last evening he had forgotten. Thus, he last night—said that it was the thinnest and meanest-looking man of the two who had struck him down with the club: but just now he said it was the stout one with a nose crushed almost flat, and who wore top boots—"

"Ah!" I exclaimed, as a suspicion flashed across my mind. "Do you recollect the description of these men? Haste, Jemima—tell me—what did Mr. Hunter say of them?"

"One," replied Jemima, amazed at the sudden excitement I had manifested, "was a short thick-set man, with his nose beaten flat, and an immense mouth gleaming with teeth looking like fangs—his head bullet-shaped and set on his shoulders as if he had no neck. The other also was a short man—very thin—and, by the bye, he was called Nick: for Charles heard his companion address him in that way."

"Enough, Jemima,—enough!" I exclaimed. "Mr. Hunter is innocent—I will stake my existence upon it! I know who the villains are—"

"You, Mary?" cried the poor young woman. "Oh, if they could be detected!"

"We will see," I rejoined. "Yes—I know them but too well. Indeed, they are the same from whose clutches I rescued little Bella."

"Ah, the dreadful men!" said Jemima, clasping her hands together: "it is a blessing that they did not murder poor Charles. But what can be done? Oh, tell me, tell me! I already feel comforted and cheered by what you have said."

"Leave the matter to me," I answered. "Say not a word to a soul that any step is being taken; and all that can be done, shall be done. Now go back to Lady Oldcastle's—you have already been away a



great number of hours—and tranquillize yourself: for I think I may safely promise you that the true perpetrators of the crime shall be brought to justice, and the innocence of your intended husband triumphantly demonstrated."

Jemima embraced me with enthusiasm; and she took her departure in a comparative state of cheerfulness and hope. It was now four o'clock: and I resolved to lose not a moment in putting into execution the project which I had in my mind. Hastening to the drawing-room, I told Laura what I had just learnt; for I had previously acquainted her with the substance of poor Jemima's trouble. I now informed her that the real plunderers of Mr. Wenlock's money, were the two dreadful men in whose custody I had been at Ashford—who were branded murderers—and on whose heads a reward was set. Miss Maitland was thrown into a perfect state of consternation when she found me bent upon bringing these dangerous characters to justice: but

I explained to her the course I intended to adopt—and her fears were then comparatively set at rest. Nevertheless, she begged that I would take one of the men-servants with me, or else procure the assistance of a police-officer: but I assured her that I much preferred going alone, and that I myself should stand but little risk. I accordingly sallied forth; and entering a hackney-coach, ordered the driver to take me to the end of Oxford Street joining the Tottenham Court Road.

It was five o'clock when I reached that point; and it being in the middle of December, the dusk had set in some while—the street-lamps were lighted, and the shops were brilliant with gas. Dismissing the hackney-coach, I unhesitatingly plunged into the maze of St. Giles's,—drawing a thick veil, however, over my countenance to escape recognition on the part of the two monsters whom I was tracking, in case I should happen to meet them. The precaution was unnecessary; and without any misad-

venture, I reached the house of the Gipsy Queen. A light was glimmering from the window of her chamber—and my summons at the door was speedily answered by herself in person. She was much surprised but well pleased to behold me, and at once admitted me into the dwelling. With a delicate consideration for my feelings, she did not conduct me up to her own chamber, which was that where my poor brother had breathed his last: but she led the way into another room; and placing the candle upon a table, she said, "I see, Mary, that it is not a mere casual visit you are paying me;"—for I had raised my veil, and she doubtless judged from my looks that I had something important on my mind.

"No, Barbauld—it is not a mere visit of friendship," I answered: "for you can well understand that this house is fraught with associations too painful for me to seek it voluntarily."

"I know it—I know it, my dear Mary," she exclaimed; "and I have all along appreciated the reason which has prevented you from visiting me for so many months past. What can I do to serve you?"

"Those dreadful men the Bulldog and Sawbridge," I answered, "are in London. At least I have every reason to believe that they are. Last night they perpetrated a robbery between Kensington and Hammersmith: they plundered an attorney's clerk of a thousand pounds in bank-notes and gold. The numbers of the notes are known. The clerk labours under the imputation of having self-appropriated the money. Now, it has occurred to me that if these two desperate villains be still in London——"

"They shall be discovered," interrupted Barbauld, "ere forty-eight hours have elapsed."

"It was for this purpose I came to you," was my response. "Doubtless they will seek the low dens of debauchery and haunts of crime with which the metropolis abounds; and even at this very moment that we are conversing here, they may be at no great distance."

"I will not lose a minute," answered the Gipsy Queen, "ere I set my people upon the search. The word shall be passed round: within three or four hours there will be hundreds on the alert."

"Oh! if you should be successful, my dear Barbauld," I exclaimed, "you will become the means of proving the innocence of a deserving young man, and of restoring happiness to an almost broken-hearted young woman, who in a few days was to accompany him to the altar."

"It is sufficient for you to wish it, Mary, that it shall be done. And now," added the Gipsy Queen, "if you have nothing more to say, we must separate at once—that I may go forth and issue my commands. But if these villains be discovered and arrested, whither are they to be taken?"

"The final examination of the accused young man, whose name is Charles Hunter, is fixed for the day after to-morrow, at Queen Square Police-office."

"Enough," said the Gipsy Queen: "leave it all to me."

I thanked her for the readiness she displayed in complying with my wishes; and we quitted the house together. She saw me as far as the confines of the Holy Land in the neighbourhood of Oxford

Street; and before we parted, I told her where I was residing, in case she should wish to communicate with me.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

QUEEN-SQUARE POLICE COURT.

THE whole of the next day passed without any note or message reaching me from the Gipsy Queen: but I was not discouraged by this silence, being well aware that she and her people were on the alert. Jemima had called in the morning; and I was glad to perceive that she was in a more tranquil frame of mind than I could have expected. I told her to return in the evening to see whether I had any further tidings. She accordingly came at about eight o'clock: and when she found that I had nothing to communicate, she was inclined to relapse into despair. I however consoled and cheered her to the best of my ability, and proceeded to explain to her the course which I had resolved to pursue under certain circumstances.

"If I learn nothing favourable by to-morrow morning, I shall not hesitate to proceed to the Police-court and request to be examined as a witness. I shall then inform the magistrate that the characters whom Mr. Hunter has described, are very far from being fictitious ones having existence only in his imagination—but that they are terribly real, as can easily be proved by the printed descriptions of them in connexion with the reward offered for their apprehension on account of a dreadful murder which they committed at Deal some time ago. When once it is thus established that there actually are such men, it will go far to prove Mr. Hunter's innocence—and indeed ought to convince any reasonable person that he is innocent. I do not know much of judicial proceedings; but arguing from the dictates of common sense, I think, Jemima, there is not the least doubt that Mr. Hunter will be liberated to-morrow without a stain on his character. Therefore keep up your spirits: I would not for the world encourage a hope which I myself do not conscientiously entertain."

The poor young woman thanked me, with tears in her eyes, for the interest I took in her behalf; and she went away confident that the morrow would behold the triumphant issue of the case in which her intended husband was involved. I sat up till a later hour than usual, in the hope of receiving some intelligence from the Gipsy Queen: but neither note nor message arrived. My dreams that night were haunted with images of the Bulldog and Sawbridge, their natural ugliness being fearfully exaggerated by the efforts of fancy; and the concluding scene of those visions depicted all the horrors of a public execution—the gallows, the assembled multitudes, the executioner, and the two miscreants themselves with the halters round their necks. Methought that I beheld the drop fall—and then, with a sudden start, I awoke.

The breakfast-hour passed; and still there was no intelligence from Barbauld Azetha. Jemima came; and she was much depressed on finding that I was still without any tidings from the quarter whence I expected them: but I recapitulated the arguments I had used on the preceding evening in

respect to what I hoped would be the issue of the evidence which I proposed to tender to the magistrate. She begged to be permitted to accompany me to the Police-court. I not only assented, but told her that I thought it was her duty to repair thither,—so that by her presence, and perhaps by a few words which she might have an opportunity of whispering to Charles Hunter, she might prove to him that she herself was firmly impressed with his innocence. But I enjoined her to maintain a proper control over her feelings, so as to avoid a scene in the court,—and to show that her mental fortitude was based on the certainty of her lover's guiltlessness. She promised to follow my counsel; and we proceeded in a hackney-coach together to the Queen Square Police-office.

On reaching this place, I looked about amongst the numerous persons assembled in the vicinage, to see if the Gipsy Queen were amongst them: but she was not there. We entered the Court, and learnt from a police-officer that Charles Hunter's case would come on in the course of half-an-hour, so soon as the magistrate should have disposed of the night charges. We accordingly placed ourselves in the most retired corner; and Jemima directed my attention to a gentleman seated in another part of the court, and who she informed me was Mr. Wenlock. He was an elderly man, with a sharp intelligent expression of countenance, but with nothing in his looks denoting an evil disposition. His air was respectable and business-like; and it was quite easy to believe that he might be a perfectly honourable and well meaning person. In a few minutes an old man with white hair, of sedate and serious aspect, entered the court and seated himself next to Mr. Wenlock, with whom he began to converse in whispers. Jemima told me that this new comer was Mr. Hobday, the managing clerk. I gazed at him very attentively to study his character, if possible, by his countenance. He wore a white neckcloth; and being dressed in black, had a half sanctimonious look: but there was nothing at all in the expression of his features to indicate that malignity of disposition which he had displayed towards Charles Hunter. I could therefore marvel but little that the testimony of two such respectable-looking persons as Mr. Wenlock and Mr. Hobday had countervailed, in the magistrate's opinion, the statement made by Jemima's intended husband.

The night charges being disposed of, there was a pause of a few minutes; and when the door of the Court opened, both Jemima and myself looked anxiously in that direction to ascertain, from Charles Hunter's mien, how he supported the heavy accusation weighing upon him. But the prisoner who was now introduced between two policemen, and with handcuffs on his wrists, was not Charles Hunter at all—but a person very well known to me. Indeed, it was none other than Mr. Tomlinson, ex-manager of many provincial theatres, and late Sole Lessee of Drury Lane.

I had my veil drawn down over my countenance: but I instinctively drew the folds more closely still, to prevent myself from being recognized by that individual: and I was certainly struck with astonishment at the moment, to behold him there and in such a plight. Nevertheless, on a second thought, I felt that I need not really entertain any surprise that his career should close in some such catastrophe

as the present one. He was superbly dressed, and had a look of mingled effrontery and pomposity as he ascended into the dock with theatrical stateliness. So far from being in the slightest degree cast down, one would have imagined by his aspect and demeanour, that he experienced the fullest confidence in his ability to scatter to the winds whatsoever charge might be made against him. He and the officers were closely followed by a tall thin lady, so closely veiled that it was impossible to obtain the slightest glimpse of her countenance: but her figure, lean almost to scragginess—her prim walk—her entire bearing indeed, struck me with the conviction that she was certainly no stranger to me. In obedience to the directions of one of the constables, she took her station in the witness-box; and then, as she slowly raised her veil to be sworn, she revealed a countenance which in a moment corroborated my suspicion: for it was the countenance of Miss Nibkins!

"Well, what case is this?" asked the magistrate.

"Bigamy, forgery, and swindling, please your worship," answered the constable who had charge of the matter.

"It is false—false as that darksome pit whose name it were wrong to breathe to ears polite," said Mr. Tomlinson, assuming a dramatic position, and slowly gesticulating with both arms, for the simple reason that he could not raise one without lifting the other at the same time, on account of the inconveniently connecting manacles.

"It's all true," said Miss Nibkins, in a voice coldly severe; "as true as that this is a world of sorrow and of sin. I am sure I accept my misfortunes with humility and thankfulness, in the firm conviction that heaven has arranged it all for my ulterior benefit."

"Then pray, ma'am, why do you come here to complain?" asked the magistrate, somewhat gruffly.

"Because, your worship," responded Miss Nibkins, with the same rigid looks and cold voice as before, "it was also destined by heaven that I should transport the villain standing in the dock."

"Then wilt thou accomplish, O cruel Nibkins! far more by means of the law than thou could'st ever do by the charms of thy person!"—and having thus delivered himself, Mr. Tomlinson gazed as complacently round the court as if he were merely performing a part upon the stage and was awaiting the wonted meed of applause.

"Come, usher, swear that lady," said the clerk of the court: "his worship is waiting to enter into the case."

The usher thereupon addressed Miss Nibkins in the following words, all of which he spoke with a kind of galvanic volubility, without making a single stop, and as if it were but one sentence without break or punctuation:—"Take off your glove and the book in the right hand the evidence which you shall give to the court shall be the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God kiss the book and hand it back to me."

Miss Nibkins accordingly pressed her thin lips to the little volume, raising her eyes at the same time in a very devout manner; and when she had been thus sworn, she crossed her wrists just over her waistband, and stood starch, prim, and demure, with her looks fixed upon the magistrate.

"Now, ma'am," said the clerk of the court, "be so kind as to tell me your name and where you live."

"I do not exactly know, sir," was the reply, "whether I ought to say that my name is Tabitha Tomlinson, or Tabitha Nibkins: for that wicked man deluded me into the solemn rite of marriage; but I have found out that he has got another wife alive. As to my residence at Derby, it is Montpelier House: but in London I am at present staying at the *Swan with two Necks* in Lad Lane."

"Each neck long and graceful as thine own, O most fair Nibkins!" held forth Mr. Tomlinson with majestic pomposity.

"Silence, prisoner!" vociferated the usher, upon whom Mr. Tomlinson bent a look of truly regal scorn.

"Now, ma'am," said the clerk of the court, "tell his worship all your complaints against the prisoner in the dock."

"I am afraid," began Miss Nibkins, "that you will think me very foolish: but my folly is deservedly punished by heaven——"

"Pray enter at once upon the subject," interrupted the magistrate impatiently: but Miss Nibkins could not be induced to tell her story otherwise than after her own fashion; and as it would occupy whole pages to record everything she said in detail, I propose to lay before the reader the main facts of the case thus tediously elicited.

It appeared that in the month of June, that being the period of vacation at Montpelier House, Miss Nibkins proceeded for the benefit of her health to the picturesque watering-place of Scarborough, at which town she had several friends and acquaintances. It was at the house of a Mr. and Mrs. Wanklin at Scarborough, that Miss Nibkins was introduced to the prisoner, at that time passing as the Hon. Captain Reginald Fitzherbert Tomlinson, and who having recently arrived at the fashionable watering-place aforesaid, was cutting a great dash and had contrived to work his way into genteel society. He lived at the first hotel in the town—appeared to have plenty of money—and was reputed to be connected with the Marquis of Pomegranate,—whose name however was not, on subsequent investigation, found in the *Peerage*. The prisoner was well aware that Miss Nibkins possessed a flourishing scholastic establishment at Derby; and he learnt from the Wanklins that she had saved by her honest industry a couple of thousand pounds—in short, that she was well-to-do in the world. Thereupon the prisoner laid a desperate siege to the heart of Miss Nibkins, and wrote her several beautiful letters, interspersed with the choicest specimens of poetry, all of his own composing. He praised her beauty and glorified her charms somewhat in the following strain:—

"Oh, that I had Golconda's gems to deck
In brilliant splendour thine enchanting neck!
Oh, for the briny ocean's rarest pearls,
Wherewith to grace thy sweet hyperion curls!
Yet were the wealth of Indus mine, the prize
Were far outshone by thine enrapturing eyes:
For in their lustrous depths young Cupid dwells,
Seen through those pure pellucid spectacles!
The softest tint of rosy morning streaks
With vermeil tenderness thy blushing cheeks;
And all the graces which the heart can warm,
Combine to deify thy faultless form.

Thy looks have all the softness of the dove:
Canst thou then wonder that thou hast my love?
My heart, that heretofore was stout and tough,
Is rent and calcined to a pinch of snuff.
Such is the force of those volcanic fires
Which in my breast thy loveliness inspires.
Yes, Tabitha! the conquest thou hast won
O'er thine till death,

REGINALD TOMLINSON."

The reader will at once admit how impossible it was for Miss Nibkins to resist those effusions of which the one just quoted is a specimen. Her heart was melted; and she consented to accompany her poetic wooer to the altar. First of all, however, she requested Mr. Wanklin to hint to Captain Tomlinson that a peep into his banker's book would be a very satisfactory preliminary. The demand was met with every appearance of the most honourable frankness: indeed, a banker's book was ready to be produced; and it seemed to show that the Hon. Captain Reginald Fitzherbert Tomlinson possessed fifteen thousand pounds in the hands of Messrs. Masterman and Co., the eminent bankers of Lombard Street. Letters from the Marquis of Pomegranate were likewise shown; and from thence it appeared that the chance of Captain Tomlinson eventually succeeding to the title and estates of that nobleman, was far from problematical. Miss Nibkins was dazzled by the prospect of one day becoming a Marchioness and being presented at Court: in short, everything appeared so satisfactory in respect to her admirer, that she made immediate preparations for the bridal and accompanied him to the altar, Mr. and Mrs. Wanklin generously providing the wedding breakfast. The happy couple repaired to Lowestoft to spend the honeymoon; after which they came up to London to enable the bridegroom, as he said, to settle some little pecuniary affairs. They took handsome apartments at the West End; and by her husband's advice, Miss Nibkins sent directions to her head teacher to carry on the school at Derby until a purchaser for that establishment could be found. But it seemed, according to the prisoner's statement, that a misunderstanding arose between him and his bankers; and his money was temporarily stopped. He thereupon desired his bride to sell out her own two thousand pounds from the funds. This she however hesitated to do: and misgivings arose in her mind. But the prisoner speedily produced the Marquis of Pomegranate's bond for ten thousand; and her suspicions were quieted. She however retained possession of the bond, and then sold out the two thousand pounds, which the prisoner forthwith began spending at the most extravagant rate, drinking his champagne every day and feasting upon the choicest luxuries. Thus some weeks elapsed, until the head teacher from Montpelier House at Derby came up to London on some business which she had to transact with her employer, Miss Nibkins; and the moment she beheld Captain Reginald Fitzherbert Tomlinson, she recognized him as having been the manager of a strolling company of players that had visited Derby between three and four years previously. The impostor, being thus thoroughly unmasked, decamped with all imaginable speed,—taking however along with him as much as remained of the two thousand pounds. Farther inquiries were thereupon instituted, when it was discovered that there was no

such peer of the realm delighting in the euphonious patronymic of Pomegranate; and that therefore the bond was a forgery, or at least a fraud. Accident likewise made Miss Nibkins acquainted with the fact that the swindler had another wife living, in the person of the elder daughter of Mr. Alderman Bull. She returned to Montpellier House at Derby to resume the direction of her school, piously resigning herself to the conviction that all she had undergone was a chastening interposition of Providence for which she ought to be meekly and devoutly thankful. But within the last few days she had received intelligence that Mr. Tomlinson was in London; and considering it part of her destiny to transport him beyond the seas, she forthwith came back to the metropolis. After some researches for Mr. Tomlinson, who appeared to be dodging about from one part of London to another, as if under the apprehension that he was "wanted,"—the indefatigable Miss Nibkins succeeded in ferreting him out on this very self-same morning when he appeared in the ignominious position of a manacled felon at the Queen Square Police-office.

Such was the history of the loves, the marriage, and the misadventures of Tabitha Nibkins and Reginald Fitzberbert Tomlinson. The forged, or rather fabricated bond was produced, and the magistrate decided upon remanding the prisoner for a week in order to afford the officer sufficient time to obtain the necessary evidence of the former marriage with Alderman Bull's daughter. It appeared that when Mr. Tomlinson was arrested, he wore a profusion of jewellery, and had about two hundred pounds in his pocket,—all of which, both valuables and money, the officers had taken from him; and as that money was supposed to form a portion of the two thousand pounds of which he had swindled Miss Nibkins, she had the satisfaction of hearing that it would no doubt be eventually restored to her. Mr. Tomlinson attempted a speech before he was removed from the dock; but as the case was not yet completed, and the magistrate had decided on a remand, his eloquence was mercilessly cut short, and he was compelled to accompany the officers to the lock-up previous to his removal to gaol. Miss Nibkins, at the conclusion of the present hearing, drew down her veil and walked out of the court in the same prim, rigid, and sedate manner as she had entered it. She did not recognize me through the folds of my veil; and I did not think it necessary to present myself to her.

The magistrate now decided upon taking the case of Charles Hunter; and the young man was accordingly introduced into the Court. He was handcuffed, and looked haggard, pale, and careworn. The sense of being wrongly accused had evidently produced a sad effect upon him. As he ascended the dock, his eyes encountered those of poor Jemima; and for an instant his countenance brightened up with an expression of grateful satisfaction at her presence. He knew who I was, and bowed respectfully but slightly, so as not to direct general attention towards me. Jemima began to weep: but I whispered a few brief earnest words, entreating her to be calm; and hastily wiping away her tears, she assured me that she would compose her feelings.

The depositions taken at the first hearing, were now read over by the clerk of the court; and the magistrate asked Mr. Wenlock whether he had any

additional evidence to bring forward? He replied that he had not; whereupon the magistrate said that he had made up his mind to commit the prisoner for trial, and inquired whether he had anything to say?

"Yes, your worship," answered Charles Hunter, his demeanour suddenly becoming firm and his voice equally collected: "I have to repeat the solemn asseveration of my innocence. Mr. Wenlock can tell you, sir, that he has frequently entrusted me with considerable sums to convey to different persons, and that on no occasion has he found the slightest irregularity. The day before yesterday Mr. Hobday insinuated that my conduct of late had not been so satisfactory as it formerly was—that I made excuses for frequently absenting myself for half-an-hour or an hour at a time—and that I had been seen talking to loose females. Now, your worship, I beg to explain that I have never spoken to more than one female—a highly respectable young woman, the upper nursemaid in a family of rank, and to whom I am engaged to be married. As for those temporary and occasional absences, they were moments snatched from work to run out and speak to this young woman; and I have frequently remained an hour or two—sometimes even three or four hours, later at the office, in order to finish any particular work with which I had been entrusted. Perhaps Mr. Hobday will answer the question, how it was that he confided so large a sum to my care if my conduct had lately proved unsatisfactory and he had seen me conversing with bad characters?"

"That question," interposed the magistrate, "can be asked on the trial. I shall not pronounce an opinion on the case: it is my duty to send it for investigation before a higher tribunal."

"Now, Jemima, it is for me to speak," I said; and throwing up my veil, I was rising for the purpose, when the door of the Police-court was thrown open, and several constables appeared, with the Bulldog and Sawbridge in the midst. "He is saved! he is saved!" I hurriedly whispered to Jemima: and she clasped her hands with an evident feeling of ecstatic thankfulness, while my own heart experienced an infusion of the liveliest joy.

The Bulldog and Sawbridge were both handcuffed: the former wore upon his countenance an expression of savage sullenness—the latter looked much dejected. Charles Hunter did not immediately perceive them: he was totally absorbed in his own anguished reflections—and with his elbows resting on the front of the dock, his face was buried in his hands. But several ejaculations burst forth from various quarters of the Court on the appearance of those villains whose personal traits so exactly corresponded with the description given by Charles Hunter of the two men who had attacked and robbed him. Mr. Wenlock started up from his seat; and I could at once perceive that he experienced a feeling of joy at a circumstance which promised to give a complete turn to the proceedings; while on the other hand it was equally evident that Mr. Hobday felt most uncomfortable.

"You are saved, Charles! you are saved!" cried Jemima, suddenly bounding forward; and seizing his manacled hands in her own, she pressed them with enthusiastic fervour.

He glanced quickly around; and the instant his eyes lighted on the villanous countenances of the

Bulldog and Sawbridge, he cried out, "Those are the men!"

"Yes, your worship," said one of the constables who had just introduced the two prisoners: "there is no doubt of it. We have found a quantity of bank-notes in their possession, all corresponding with the numbers of those that this young man was robbed of."

There was now quite a sensation in the Court; and the magistrate, at once ordering Charles Hunter's manacles to be taken off, directed him to change his position from the dock to the witness-box. Ah! what an expression of ineffable delight—what a glow of mingled pride and triumph, appeared upon the countenance of Charles Hunter at that moment! Poor Jemima sobbed and cried like a child; and altogether the scene was one of the most interesting and affecting ever beheld in a court of justice.

As the Bulldog and Sawbridge were placed in the dock, their eyes fell upon me: the former gave me a look of diabolic ferocity—the latter one of mingled surprise and malignity; and then they exchanged significant glances with each other, as much as to imply that from my presence there they had not the slightest doubt I was in some way or another connected with their capture. But they spoke not a word; and everybody in the Court was too much occupied with the contemplation of the tender scene that again took place between Jemima and Charles, to observe the look which the two miscreants cast upon me. For the moment the manacles were taken off her lover's wrists, Jemima threw her arms round his neck; and (as she afterwards told me) utterly forgetful that so many eyes were upon her, expressed her congratulation in a warm embrace. The magistrate did not attempt to repress this exhibition of intense feeling, but appeared himself to be affected by it. Jemima returned to her place by my side; and in a voice which, though subdued, was full of grateful emotions, she said, "Best and dearest friend that I ever had! for all this happiness are we indebted to you."

I looked amongst the crowd on the opposite side of the Court near the door, to see if the Gipsy Queen were there—but she was not; and it therefore occurred to me that she did not wish to be seen prominently in the proceeding. Charles Hunter now recapitulated as a witness the narrative which he had previously told in the form of defence; and when he had concluded, the magistrate was about to make some remarks, but a sergeant of police stepped forward and addressed him in these terms:—

"Your worship, there is a much graver charge to be preferred against the two prisoners in the dock. I produce a placard issued at Maidstone in the month of April, 1831, offering a reward of one hundred guineas for the apprehension of each of these two men on the charge of murdering John Plummers of the Preventive Service at Deal."

"In that case," said the magistrate, "the two prisoners must be sent to Maidstone for trial; and should they escape conviction on the capital charge, they will have to be brought back to London to answer the accusation of highway robbery preferred against them by Mr. Hunter. You will see, sergeant, that they are taken to Maidstone under sufficient escort. As for you, Mr. Hunter, you were discharged from the moment you left that dock; and you will

quit this court without a stain on your character. I must candidly confess that I was somewhat prejudiced against you, not only by the confusion you displayed in making your statement on the former occasion when you were before me, but still more so by the overstrained evidence of Mr. Hobday. Yes, sir," continued the magistrate, fixing his eyes severely upon Hobday, who now trembled like a leaf, while his countenance was as white as his neckcloth, "you *did* overstrain your evidence; and it is my duty to express the opinion that you were actuated by some malignant motives towards this young man."

"Will your worship permit me one observation?" said Mr. Wenlock, rising and addressing the magistrate: "for I feel that I have an atonement to make towards Mr. Hunter. Unfortunately I suffered myself to be swayed by the underhand and designing representations of this person"—and he contemptuously indicated Hobday as he spoke. "At first I was fully inclined to believe Charles Hunter's story; and I should have believed it—indeed, he never would have been in custody, were it not for the insidious whisperings of this individual whose motives I can now thoroughly see through. I can assure your worship that from this moment Mr. Hobday will cease to be in my employment; and his situation of principal clerk I cheerfully offer to Mr. Hunter, with the hope that he will accept it."

"Your conduct, Mr. Wenlock," said the magistrate, "is highly praiseworthy. I of course make an order that all these bank-notes which were found upon the persons of the prisoners in the dock, and which have been identified as your own, shall be restored to you. I find that there are seven hundred and fifty pounds altogether. Perhaps a considerable portion of the remainder will be yet forthcoming: for it is scarcely possible that these men could have expended the difference in so short a time."

"If, your worship, I have to endure the loss of the balance," said Mr. Wenlock, "it will be a proper punishment for my too great readiness in charging an innocent young man. But I hope he will forgive me."

Thus speaking, the lawyer extended his hand to Charles Hunter, who pressed it with effusion: while Mr. Hobday slunk out of court, thoroughly discomfited and crestfallen. The Bulldog and Sawbridge had all this while maintained a sullen silence: but ever and anon they cast looks of glowering rage and spite upon me. For those, however, I cared nothing. I may without vanity say that I do not possess a bad heart: but I will as frankly admit that I entertained not the least scintillation of compassion for those two wretches. I was opposed to the punishment of death: but so long as it continued the law, I could not help thinking that never did two human beings more richly deserve that law's vengeance than the miscreants standing in the dock.

"Before you remove them, officers," said the magistrate, "give me an account of their capture."

"From information I received about two hours back," said the sergeant, "I took with me several constables; and we proceeded to a low public-house called the *Tramper's Arms* in St. Giles's."

"The very place," whispered Jemima to me, "whence you rescued little Bella."

"And where," I rejoined, also in a low tone, "I all along had some suspicion that these villains would be discovered."

"I stationed some of my men," continued the sergeant, "so as to surround the house; and then entered it with the rest. The landlord did not oppose us: but he would not give us any information. On the contrary, he stoutly denied that there were any such persons as those whom we sought beneath his roof. We commenced an immediate search, and found them in a little room on the highest storey of the premises. They were drinking and smoking, although at such an early hour of the day; and we burst in so suddenly upon them that the resistance they attempted was promptly frustrated. We searched them on the spot, and discovered those bank-notes about their persons."

When this statement was made, the Bulldog and Sawbridge were removed from the dock, which they quitted each in the same mood that they had entered it—the former doggedly sullen—the latter dispirited, but with malignant looks. Charles Hunter now came to conduct Jemima forth from the Police-court; and I accompanied them. Mr. Wenlock likewise joined us; and when we were at a little distance from the crowd gathered about the entrance of the office, Jemima whispered to her lover that he was indebted for his deliverance to me. He expressed his gratitude in the liveliest terms. Mr. Wenlock heard what passed, and said something exceedingly complimentary with regard to my conduct. We all four entered a hackney-coach, and proceeded back to our own neighbourhood. There I took leave of my companions—and returned home, full of joy at the result of my interposition in the above mentioned transactions. Laura Maitland was delighted to hear of my success; and I failed not to write a letter to the Gipsy Queen expressive of my thanks for the succour she had lent in the proceeding.

A few days afterwards the marriage of Charles Hunter and Jemima Wilkinson took place. The wedding-breakfast was given by Mr. and Mrs. Wenlock, who were now most anxious to make every atonement to Charles as well as to Jemima, for the misery they had endured. Laura, in order to express the interest she felt in their behalf, sent through me a gift of a very handsome watch and chain for the bride; and I also made her a present in accordance with my means. It was a happy day for them; and their married life commenced under new and very favourable auspices: for instead of an increased salary to the amount of thirty shillings a-week, Mr. Hunter could congratulate himself and his bride that they commenced housekeeping with an income of two hundred a-year.

CHAPTER CXXX.

A JOURNEY.

THE sessions of the Old Bailey commenced; and I watched the newspapers for the trial of Mr. Tomlinson, who, as a matter of course, had been fully committed on the charges alleged against him. The judicial investigation was reported at considerable length in the journals; and some portions of the proceedings appeared to have afforded no small

degree of merriment to the Court and the spectators. The ex-manager was represented as conducting himself with the most self-sufficient effrontery blended with a most stately pomposity; while the appearance of the prim demure-looking Miss Nibbins was described with a fidelity as whimsical as it was accurate. A great number of the love-letters which Mr. Tomlinson had written, were read by the counsel for the prosecution; and the poetic effusions elicited roars of laughter. Evidence was adduced to prove the prisoner's first marriage with Alderman Bull's eldest daughter Elizabeth; and she herself was present in Court as a spectatress of the trial. From the remarks which the newspaper made respecting her appearance on the occasion, I have no doubt that she gloated over the downfall of the man whom she had once loved, but had speedily hated. I certainly was somewhat astonished to read in the report that she had thus indelicately exposed herself to become the subject of general observation: for I had thought that her pride would prevent her from adopting such a course. But no doubt this pride of her's was overruled by a sentiment of hatred; and hence her appearance on that occasion. Mr. Tomlinson, disdaining to employ counsel for his defence, conducted it for himself; and it appeared that he addressed the jury in a speech of more than an hour's duration, delivering it with what he no doubt considered to be the grandest theatrical effect. It was interlarded with countless quotations from Shakspeare and other dramatists; and was accompanied by an infinite variety of gesticulations. It failed however to produce the desired impression upon the jury: for they found him guilty, and he was condemned to transportation beyond the seas for fourteen years. About a week afterwards the trial of the Bulldog and Sawbridge, for the murder of John Plummers, took place at Maidstone: for in consequence of an unusually increased amount of crime in Kent at this particular period, a Winter Assize had been ordered by the Government. Such was the statement I read in the newspapers. I had all along been afraid that my presence would be required as a witness to prove certain things against them: namely, in respect to the identification of the clasp-knife with which the murder was perpetrated, and the conversation that I had overheard behind the boat on Deal beach. But my attendance was rendered unnecessary from a circumstance which occurred: this was the appearance of the woman Ann—or Mrs. Sawbridge, as she had called herself—as a witness against the prisoners. She identified the knife; and she likewise deposed to having overheard the prisoners frequently converse together upon the subject of the murder. In her cross-examination she admitted that having been cruelly ill-treated by Sawbridge, who had suspected her of infidelity to him, she had left him a few weeks previously to the arrest; and that she was influenced by vindictive motives in coming forward to bear this testimony against him. Nevertheless, the general tenour of her evidence could not be shaken: for she deposed to a variety of facts which clearly established the guilt of the two prisoners. From the dock Sawbridge levelled the most terrific abuse against the woman: but the Bulldog maintained a sullen and ferocious silence. The jury found them guilty; and they were condemned to death. Saw-

bridge was completely overpowered when the Judge passed sentence: the Bulldog continued in his mood of firm and dogged sulkiness. The former was borne yelling and vociferating piteously from the dock: the latter walked back to the prison with a firm step. I read the account of the trial with a sickening sensation at the heart; and when I had finished the perusal, I determined that I would not look into the newspapers again until the lapse of time should have caused the names of those dreadful characters to be no more mentioned.

In order to preface the incident which I am about to relate, some few words of explanation are necessary. I had never lost sight of the immense service which Mad Tommy rendered me when he effected my liberation from the den where I was confined at Ashford by those villains of whom I have just been speaking: but on several occasions since that incident, I had remitted a little money, and had sent parcels of linen and other necessities, to Farmer Jackson's for the poor fellow's use. When thus thinking of him, I was wont to write to Mrs. Jackson to make inquiries relative to his welfare; and she had invariably written back to acknowledge the receipt of the money or parcels, assuring me that my good intentions with regard to him should be fully carried out. During the six or seven months I had now been with Miss Maitland, I had made more frequent remittances for Mad Tommy's benefit, inasmuch as my means rendered me better enabled to do so: and thus Mrs. Jackson knew my address in London.

It was one Monday morning, at the beginning of February, 1833, that at about half-past seven o'clock, just I had finished dressing, a letter was brought up to me by the housemaid; and I at once recognized Mrs. Jackson's handwriting. On opening the letter, I found the contents to be as follow:—

"Mapleton Farm, near Ashford.
"Sunday evening.

"Dear Miss,

"As you have shown so much kind interest on behalf of poor Thomas Dawson, I consider it my duty to inform you that in consequence of a very severe accident he sustained by a cart running over his legs, he has been given up by the doctor. He cannot possibly recover; nor is it likely he will survive many days—perhaps not many hours. But a marvellous change has come over him: the poor fellow has grown quite rational, and talks as sensibly as if his intellects had never been weak at all. He says that he has got something very particular indeed, that he wishes to communicate to you; and he beseeches that you will lose no time in coming to see him, if you possibly can. If you cannot, he says that when he feels his end approaching—for he is perfectly conscious it is coming—he will dictate to me what he has to say, so that I may write it down and forward it to you: but he would much prefer telling it to you in person. This indeed seems to be so earnest a wish on his part that I do hope, if it is practicable, you will come and see him. It is something about a scene that he witnessed on the bank of the River Stour a few years ago at the time you lost your poor mother. This is all he will tell me for the present: but he has said this much that I may convince you it is really on an important matter and no trivial thing for which he desires to see you.

"Fortunately a friend of my husband's is going up to London by the night-coach, and he has promised to leave this letter for you to-morrow morning at as early an hour as possible.

"I remain, Dear Miss,

"Your very obedient servant,

"PAMELA JACKSON."

This letter immediately threw me into a state of mingled excitement and suspense; and I flew with it to Laura's chamber. She, having learnt from my lips all the particulars of my past history, immediately perceived—as I myself had already seen—that the revelation which Mad Tommy had to make, could regard nothing else than the presumed suicide of my father on the bank of the river. She therefore said that I must depart at once, without an instant's delay; and ringing the bell for her maid, she bade her order the footman to go and procure a post-chaise.

I said that I would take the coach: for although I was eager indeed to learn the promised communication, yet I did not like playing the part of the lady to such an extent as to travel post. But Laura would not hear of it: her commands were therefore executed; and I hastened to my own chamber to pack up a few necessities and dress myself for the journey. Having partaken of a cup of tea—for I could not eat a morsel of solid food—I bade Miss Maitland a temporary farewell; and entered the post-chaise, which was promptly in readiness. The footman, understanding from the abruptness of my departure, that my business must be pressing—although, he was unaware of its nature—bade the postilion proceed at the most rapid rate to which he could urge his horses; and this command was so efficiently obeyed, that the vehicle sped along as if it were a matter of life and death. I discovered, by the distance achieved at the first halt we made for changing horses, that I had been going at the rate of a good twelve miles an hour. It was half-past eight when I entered the post-chaise: Ashford was about sixty miles from Kensington—and therefore I calculated that I should reach Farmer Jackson's by two o'clock.

But as I proceeded along, varied and serious indeed were the thoughts which agitated in my mind. Was Thomas Dawson—for so, it appeared, was Mad Tommy called, although I had never known his surname till now;—was he, I say, about to throw some new light upon that incident upon the river's bank, concerning the precise nature of which I had never entertained any doubt until I beheld, at the house in St. Giles's, that person whom the gipsies called by the name of *Graham*? Was he going to give me some new version of the incident? was I about to receive another and different explanation? had I in the first instance put a wrong construction on his words? and was I now on my way to receive the right one? Should I hear anything to corroborate the suspicion that it was possible for my poor father to be still alive? This suspicion had faded away, or at least slumbered and remained latent, until suddenly revived again by the scene which occurred on the occasion of my brother Robert's death; and during the nine months which had now elapsed since that occurrence, the suspicion had often and often flamed up anew in my mind. But if I had not adopted any means either to confirm or to dissipate it, it was because there was only one quarter where I could seek for positive information—namely, at the hands of the gipsies; and I had already obtained from Barbauld as much as she could or would give in the shape of answer. But now the letter I had received from Mrs. Jackson appeared to establish something bordering upon a conviction in my mind, that the suspicion already



cherished would prove to have been a real stepping-stone to the final unravelment of some important and solemn truth.

I said to myself, as I was being whirled along in the post-chaise, "Let me reflect as minutely as I possibly can, upon all the details of that memorable evening when Mad Tommy appeared upon the threshold of the cottage-door at Ashford, and when I and my brothers and sisters were sitting together with our hands locked in each other's clasp, and looking eloquent in the deep silence of our grief." I recalled to mind every detail of Mad Tommy's conduct on that occasion. I recollected how he advanced slowly into the room—how he came close up to us, and said with a strange tone and a still stranger look, "*Gene, gone—both parents gone. They told me that the mother was dead; and I saw the father—I shouldn't keep it from you—no, no: it is not likely, it is not likely! Down by the river just*

now—I saw it all—throat cut first—plunge in afterwards—dreadful, dreadful!" Those were the words which Mad Tommy had used at the time. But what if my poor father had not inflicted a mortal wound upon himself? What if he had soon after been rescued from the river, or had scrambled out by his own remaining strength? and what if, in a morbid state of mind, he had ever since withdrawn himself from the presence and the knowledge of his children? Oh! if all this were the case, then indeed might he still be alive!—then indeed might he be identical with that Graham whom I had twice seen! But granting all these suppositions to be true, what more could Mad Tommy have to relate concerning the incident of that memorable evening in the summer of 1826? Had he beheld anything more than the deed of suicide on the bank of the river? I could not understand it: I was at a loss to conjecture what important secret the dying

Thomas Dawson could have to reveal: but that it was anything of a criminal nature in respect to himself, I did not for a single moment fancy.

In such bewildering thoughts as these was I wrapped up from stage to stage, while the post-chaise was whirling along. At length we neared the town of Maidstone. I looked at my watch: it wanted ten minutes to twelve: we had come nearly forty miles in three hours and twenty minutes. When the outskirts of the town were reached, it was found that the entire road was undergoing a state of repair; and the post-chaise had to take a circuitous route. As it subsequently appeared, the postilion who drove the horses this stage, had but recently entered the service of his present employer; and was a comparative stranger to that part of the country. The consequence was, that having to diverge from the main road and take a circuitous route to enter the town, he mistook his way. This however I did not perceive at the time. The day was dark and gloomy: the sky was of a dull leaden appearance—and its effect was by no means cheering to the spirits of one whose thoughts had been wandering through such sombre channels. I lay back in the chaise, muffled up in shawls and furs: but I nevertheless felt so cold that my teeth chattered. The windows were up; and the glass was dimmed by my breath, which settled upon the panes like a mist. I knew that we were in Maidstone: but I did not care to look forth either from the right or the left: all my attention was concentrated inward—all my thoughts were engrossed by the object of this journey and the reminiscences as well as associations it had conjured up. Presently I began to observe that the chaise went slower and slower, as if passing amidst some obstructions. Wondering what these could be, I looked towards the window, without however having energy enough to wipe off the steam settled upon the glass; and through its dimness, methought I perceived a large crowd of persons. Then suddenly arose a variety of ejaculations,—the postilion shouting to the people to stand aside, and they answering him, some with jeers, some with remonstrances, some with sulky gruffness, and some with downright abuse.

"You won't be able to pass this way, post-boy!" vociferated one.

"Go round by t'other turning, and be hanged to you!" cried a second voice.

"Let the poor feller be!" shouted a third. "Don't you see it's as much as he can do to sit on his hoss?"

"Come, I say," growled a fourth, "keep that there whip of yours to yourself—will'oe?"

"Take care of his spurs!" screeched out the shrill voice of a woman. "Don't squeeze me up agin 'em."

"Here's the constables!" exclaimed another of the crowd.

"Come, make way there," spoke some one in an authoritative tone: and I at once concluded he must be a police-officer. "The chaise must pass on. Stand out of the way, I say!"

And it appeared that the way *was* opened somewhat, and speedily too: for the vehicle rolled onward at a quicker rate than it had been pursuing for the last few minutes. But what did all this mean? what was this crowd? was it market-day at Maidstone? Ah! but while I was asking myself

these questions, I heard the tolling of a bell,—a bell which struck deep and ominous upon the brain, sending its metallic gloom down into the very heart. It was evidently a funeral knell—deep, solemn, awful. But whose funeral could it be that created such an immense interest as to have gathered such a mass of people?—for as I wiped the window-panes with the fringes of the tassels, I saw that it was a perfect sea of human heads, right and left, and all around. I grew frightened. Wherefore did the postilion persist in driving on in that direction? I had a great mind to open one of the windows and desire him to take the turning which had been indicated by one of the crowd, or else turn back: but there was a vague and unknown terror in my mind—a species of consternation for which I could not account; and I sat still—but looking uneasy first out of one window, and then out of the other.

From this stupor of dull and numbed powerlessness I was suddenly startled by an ejaculation sent forth from countless tongues.

"There they are!"—and then I beheld every human being who was within the scope of my vision look in a particular direction: so that in a single instant it appeared as if the eyes of each and all were rivetted upon one common focus. The chaise now stopped short: it was completely hemmed in around by the crowd; and as the postilion subsequently informed me, he could not have dared proceed without risk of driving over the people so densely packed together. I mechanically looked in the same direction to which all other eyes were bent. Good heavens, what did I behold? Where the carriage had halted, it commanded a view of the front of a prison—that prison which I had seen before and which I immediately recognized;—and there, from amidst that ocean of human beings, rose up something black and ominous. One glance showed me all: and in an instant, quick as the eye can wink, I comprehended it too! It was the day of an execution; and two men, with white night-caps upon their heads, stood on the platform of the gallows—two ropes depending from the horizontal spar above them!

Yes: it was but *one* glance which I flung in that direction,—*one* glance alone,—a glance that flashed thither rapid as the lightning-gleam, and was withdrawn quick as the lightning itself vanishes away. And then I sank back all cold and shivering in a corner of the chaise; and a low moan of deep unutterable horror went forth slowly from my lips. Doubtless those two men were the Bulldog and Sawbridge, about to expiate their crimes upon the scaffold; and it was because I had not looked in a newspaper since the time of their trial a fortnight back, that I had remained thus unaware of the day fixed for their execution. But, Oh! did it not seem as if it were something more than mere accident that I, who on various occasions had suffered so much by those men, should thus be led thither to catch a glimpse of them—rapid and transient though it were—at the moment they were about to be launched into eternity? Oh, it was to *them* that my poor dead brother Robert had owed his initiation in the ways of vice; and it appeared as if it were a dispensation of a superior power that I, who had witnessed *his* death-bed, should have been brought to that spot to behold *their* retributive doom.

I said that it was but one glance which I threw in the direction of the fatal spot where the terrible paraphernalia of death met my eyes. But all that I did see, is as deeply impressed upon my memory as if I had fixed my regards for an entire hour upon the dark and sinister spectacle. The day, as previously observed, was full of a misty gloom; and the prison walls frowned ominously upon the surrounding multitude. The white night-caps of the two culprits, crowning as it were their dark forms as seen at a distance, produced a ghastly effect. The chaplain in his black gown was there, standing upon the scaffold, near the criminals. Another person was likewise there; and *that* person, at the instant when my eyes glanced upon the scene, was preparing to adjust the halter of one of the doomed wretches to the pendant hook from the cross-beam. That man, then, was the executioner!—Oh, the loathsome office! The moment my regards had embraced the details I have just described, I sank back in the chaise—covering, shivering, shuddering—coldly quivering from head to foot. My sensations were those of a dreadful shock mingled with a wild affright and a profound horror. Even if there had been no crowd, and the chaise could have moved on, I had not the power to give the requisite order. In a few moments I became aware that a deep dead silence had fallen upon the crowd—a silence that was profoundly ominous and solemnly awful,—broken only by the continued tolling of the bell, and methought by the murmuring sounds of a voice praying—doubtless that of the chaplain. Suddenly there was a sound as of the simultaneous fetching of a long gasp on the part of every individual of the crowd, after the breath had remained for some moments suspended. The bell had suddenly ceased—the voice of the chaplain was heard no more—and the conviction struck to my mind that the drop had fallen. But not for worlds could I have again looked forth from the chaise-window! Had my own life depended on it, I could not have gazed at that process of taking away the lives of others!

"How hard the stout one seems to die," said a woman in a subdued and shuddering voice close by the chaise-door; but though the window was shut, I heard her quite plain.

"That's the Bulldog," said the voice of a man in response to the remark just made. "Look how his hands are quivering! how he is working them up and down! You may well say he is dying hard! But the other fellow is dead already. There now—the motions of the Bulldog's hands grow feeble and feebler—and now they have ceased altogether. *He is dead too.*"

And such appeared to be the case: for the multitude was now released from that awful silence which had kept it spell-bound;—men and women began to talk again—at first in whispers, but gradually in louder tones; and then arose a voice bawling out "The last dying speech and confession of Ben the Bulldog and Nick Sawbridge, which was executed for the barbarous murder of John Plummers! On'y von ha'penny—on'y von ha'penny!"

"Why, they made no dying speech at all," cried another voice: and then there was an outburst of laughter in the immediate vicinity of the chaise. The ice now seemed to be fairly broken on the part

of the crowd; and the current of their rudely hilarious spirits bubbled and flowed again. That first peal of laughter was quickly followed by a second, elicited by some jest; and in a few minutes the sounds of myriads of tongues were as gay and mirthful as if it were a holiday.

"They won't cut 'em down till one o'clock," said a man: "and in the meantime let us go to the public and have a drop of beer."

This invitation received the verbal assent of several of the proposer's companions; and the same course being no doubt adopted by various other parties, the crowd began to be thinned, at least to such an extent that the chaise was enabled to pursue its way. Unspeakable was my relief when that living ocean was traversed, and the vehicle rolled along in comparative freedom once more: but again I could not help thinking of the singularity of the accident, or the providential dispensation, which had brought me to that town on this particular day when the two wretches whom I most dreaded on the face of the earth were being launched into eternity!

I would fain have stopped at Maidstone for a few minutes to have paid a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin: but I was too anxious to reach the end of my journey—and I moreover thought that I could call upon that worthy couple on my return. A little before two o'clock the four spires of the fine old church at Ashford appeared in the distance; and I sighed as I reflected that in the burial-ground where that antique edifice stood, lay the remains of my poor mother. In the train of thought which I was now pursuing, it was natural for me to think with wonder and curiosity again upon that letter with the black seal which appeared to have been the origin of so many domestic afflictions; and I could not help fancying that the time was near at hand when it would be necessary for me to open the envelope in which Mr. Collins had sealed up that letter, and make myself acquainted with its contents. While I was thus meditating the post-chaise had diverged from the main road, in pursuance of instructions which I had already given to the postilion who rode this last stage; and instead of entering the town, it proceeded in the direction of Talbot Abbey. Oh! here were scenes conjuring up fresh recollections in my mind—and painful ones, too: for there was the spot where I had first seen Edgar Selden—there was the gate opening into the field in which I had found him with Sarah: and what had been the result of her acquaintance with him?—Oh! and what had become of her now? where was she, unhappy girl?

The post-chaise dashed up to the front of the comfortable homestead belonging to Mapleton Farm: the door of the house opened—and out came Farmer Jackson and his wife to receive me. I had never seen them before, and found them to be middle-aged people, whose looks denoted the benevolence of their hearts. In reply to my anxious inquiries concerning Mad Tommy, I learnt that he was still alive, but that one of his legs had been amputated, and that the other was so much injured, it would be removed likewise, only that the medical man feared lest the poor fellow might die under the operation. As it was, however, recovery was impossible; and he was gradually sinking. I was

profoundly afflicted to hear such ill intelligence concerning one who had ever shown, in his own strange way, so kind a feeling towards myself: for until my arrival at the farm I had entertained the hope that some change for the better might possibly have taken place in his condition. I was shown into a neatly furnished parlour; and while Mrs. Jackson went up to prepare the invalid to receive me, the farmer gave me a brief account of the misadventure which threatened so inevitably to prove fatal.

It appeared that on the Friday previous—this being a Monday of which I am writing—poor Tommy had been sent upon an errand to Talbot Abbey; and on returning down the road, he overtook one of Farmer Jackson's carts. By the consent of the driver, he got upon the shaft to have a ride: something startled the horse, which shied in such a manner as to fling Tommy off his seat; and in an instant the huge wheel went over his legs. The driver put him into the cart, and took him to the farm, where he was at once placed in bed; while Farmer Jackson, mounting his horse, galloped away as hard as he could to procure surgical assistance. Until the arrival of the medical man, poor Tommy lay in a kind of torpor. The surgeon at once saw the necessity of amputating at least one of the limbs, if not both: but the left leg was more shockingly injured than the right. Tommy recovered his senses while the preparations for the amputation was in progress; and he spoke more rationally and consecutively than ever he had been known to do before. He endured the operation with the utmost fortitude, and soon afterwards fell into a profound slumber. Throughout the ensuing night he slept well, awaking only at distant intervals, and then complaining of excessive thirst: but when some refreshing beverage was administered, he soon went to sleep again. All Saturday he lay in what Farmer Jackson described as "a reflecting mood,"—speaking but little, yet showing in whatever he did say an evident and increasing strengthening of the intellectual powers. Throughout Saturday night he slept almost as continuously as before; and when he awoke on the Sunday morning, he began to converse with a degree of lucidity which quite astonished Mr. and Mrs. Jackson. The more he appeared to be declining physically, the greater seemed to become his intellectual powers. It was evident that he was exerting all the energies of his mind to collect his thoughts, and to deliver his memory from the clouds which hung around it. He spoke of his earliest years; and after repeating the name of *Dawson* several times, at length said that he knew it was his own—it was that of the father and mother who had died when he was but five or six years old. Then he began to weep:—long and piteously did he thus weep; and that outpouring of tears seemed to produce a still farther beneficial effect with regard to his mind and memory. In the course of the forenoon of that day (Sunday) he mentioned my name frequently; and it appeared to turn his thoughts into some new channel. Then he raised his hand to his head, pressing it upon his brow for several minutes as if to collect and steady his thoughts with all his power; and again and again, during the three or four ensuing hours, did he continue meditating in this manner. As Farmer Jackson described it to me, there was evidently

something hovering in his mind which he could not precisely fix upon and comprehend at once: he was straining his mental vision by continuous efforts, as a wanderer lost upon a heath endeavours to assure himself of the reality of a light which seems to glimmer through a length of gloom. But at last, and after many of these efforts alike so powerful and so painful, poor Tommy succeeded in dispelling the clouds which hung around his mind and obscured his reminiscences; and then it was that, late on Sunday afternoon, he told Mrs. Jackson "how much he wished to see Mary Price—for that he had something of the greatest importance to communicate to her." Until that moment he was unaware that Mrs. Jackson was acquainted with my address: for when I had sent little presents of money and linen for the poor fellow's use, I had requested that she would make it appear as if they all came from herself and were in acknowledgment of his good services. This I had done, knowing that in the peculiar state of his mind he would be gratified by thinking that he had so well earned that extra money and those articles of apparel. Thus was it that he was unaware of Mrs. Jackson having corresponded with me; and suffering though he was,—perfectly aware too that he lay upon his death-bed,—the poor fellow was immensely delighted on learning that his mistress was acquainted with my address. Mrs. Jackson promised to write without delay; and it fortunately happened that a friend of her husband's, dwelling in the neighbourhood, had business to take him promptly to London, and who could therefore be made the bearer of the letter. From that moment the unfortunate sufferer's intellects appeared to expand in lucidity more quickly than hitherto. He then seemed to have a positive and tangible motive for battling, as it were, against whatsoever confusion of the thoughts still remained: an impulse was given to his mental energies—and as Mrs. Jackson stated in her note to me, he became as calm and rational, as collected and as lucid, as if he had never been otherwise in his life.

Such was the interesting but affecting narrative which I received from the lips of Farmer Jackson; and by the time it was concluded, his wife came down to escort me to the poor sufferer's chamber. I said a few hurried words to the worthy people, expressive of my satisfaction on account of the kindness with which they had so evidently treated poor Tommy; and then I accompanied Mrs. Jackson up-stairs to the room where the invalid lay. It was a nicely-furnished chamber: a cheerful fire burnt in the grate—and a buxom-looking lass, an orphan niece of Mrs. Jackson, who dwelt at the farm, was officiating as nurse. The sufferer himself lay stretched in that bed from which he was never more to rise alive. He was terribly altered since I had seen him last; and the hand of death had already begun to mark his countenance. But the moment he beheld me that countenance brightened up; and though it was evidently with a painful effort, he stretched out his hand to greet me. I felt that my eyes were dimmed with tears as I took that hand—bony inside but emaciated all over—and pressed it with a sisterly warmth. Mrs. Jackson, knowing that Tommy wished to speak to me on some important subject, beckoned her niece away; and they quitted the room together.

I sat down on a chair by the bedside, and looked

in the countenance of the poor dying man. I saw that his eyes had totally lost that strange vacant wandering look which had been wont to characterize them; and that their expression was now settled, rational, and full of a melancholy resignation. He gazed upon me for a few moments; and then said, "You have come, Miss Price, to see me: you will never see me again! I am going to another world that I remember my parents used to talk of when I was a little boy, and which kind Mrs. Jackson and her niece have been speaking about. I know it is a world where those people go who have never done any harm; and I don't think that I have ever done any harm—I am sure I have not of my own accord, or with any bad intention."

"I am sure you have not, Tommy," I said; "and you will go to that better world of which you speak."

"Those wicked men," he resumed, alluding to the Bulldog and Sawbridge, "once took me up to London, you know, and wanted me to do wicked things: but I would not. I did not understand much about right and wrong then: but I knew enough not to follow their advice."

"I recollect very well, Tommy," I said, "that you told me so when I met you in London at the time, and when you helped me to recover that little baby. That was a good deed, Tommy—and all the deeds you have ever done that I am acquainted with, have been good."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say so, Miss Price: for I know that you are good—so very good to everybody—and you have been good to me. Mrs. Jackson has been telling me to-day how you have sent down money and different things for my use. God bless you, Miss Price! I always knew how good, and kind, and generous you were; and that was why I loved to do anything for you. Oh! don't cry, I would not for the world say anything to make you cry!"

"Well, I will not, Tommy. And now tell me—did you not wish to see me for some very particular purpose?"

"Yes—for a very particular purpose," he said, repeating my words: then he placed his hand to his brow as if to collect his thoughts completely again—but it was only for a moment that he held it there. "Since I have been lying in this bed," he continued, "I have recollected strange things. It seemed to me that I used to know of things only as if they were objects dimly seen through a mist. But when lying here, I fixed my eyes upon them with the determination of looking at them steadily, till I could distinguish them altogether and entirely. They gradually came nearer and nearer—I saw them better and better—the fog grew thinner and thinner—at last it went away altogether, and the whole prospect was flooded with a light that made all things perfectly plain. Do you understand me, Miss Price? I am afraid you don't."

"I do, my good friend—indeed I do. You could not possibly express yourself better!"—and as I spoke a glow of satisfaction appeared upon the countenance which had been gazing up so earnestly into my own.

"Miss Price," he resumed, again looking very serious, "I am going to speak to you about something that will make you sad: for I do not think you can know anything about it—and I hardly know why you ought to know anything about it—

yet it seems as if there was a secret voice in my soul which tells me to reveal what I know."

"Go on, my good friend," said I, now enduring a torturing suspense, which was however strangely blended with a solemn awe: for I felt that I was standing upon the threshold of some momentous revelation.

"You recollect that evening—it was a summer's evening," continued the invalid, "when I came to your cottage and told you something——"

"That was more than six years and a half ago," I observed, perceiving that he paused for some answer or remark on my side.

"Ah! I don't recollect how long," he resumed, with an expression of pain and vexation on his countenance; "and if I try to think about time, it makes the fog come up again before my eyes. But about that evening. Now don't be unhappy, Miss Price—don't be sad at what I am going to tell you: you can't help it—you are not to blame——"

"No, no, Tommy—I am not sad—I am not unhappy," I said, in a state of the most feverish suspense. "Do tell me—what is it my good friend?"

"I am going to tell you," he continued: then after a brief pause, during which he closed his eyes for a moment as if to throw all the power of his vision inward, he said, "Yes, I see it all now: it's as clear before me as if it was happening at this instant. There is the river's bank—there is the great bush under which I was lying on the grass to rest myself after a very long walk——"

"Well, Tommy, go on," I said, shuddering with a vague apprehension that I was about to hear something more dreadful than I had anticipated.

"Yes," continued Tommy, not exactly seeming to heed my remark: "there I was, half asleep under that bush,—and it was close upon sunset, when I saw that gentleman come walking along the bank—and he looked very unhappy—yes, so unhappy—and he was dressed in deep black too——"

"What gentleman, Tommy? what gentleman, Tommy? for God's sake speak! do tell me!"

"That gentleman, Miss Price, who gave me the letter—the letter with the black seal, you know."

"Yes, yes, I remember!"—and heaven knows that I did remember the letter full well—*too* well—for there had not been a day of my life ever since that terrible date on which I had not thought of it. "Well, Tommy, that gentleman who gave you the letter——"

"And a large silver piece—it was a crown, I recollect it well," continued the unfortunate sufferer: "it was this gentleman that I saw walking along the bank of the river. So I got up and spoke to him. He asked me if I had delivered the letter safe to Mrs. Price?—and I told him I had. I told him too that Robert—your brother Robert, I mean—wanted to take it from me, but I wouldn't let him; for the gentleman had told me to give it only into Mrs. Price's own hand. Well, he seemed pleased that I had followed his directions; and he was just on the point of putting his hand in his pocket—I dare say to give me something more—yes, I remember it well—but just at that instant—Oh! what a fearful scene it was that followed!"

"What was it? what scene followed?—in mercy's sake tell me, Tommy!"—and I shuddered all over.

"Dreadful, dreadful!" ejaculated the dying suf-

ferer: and the wild apprehension flitted through my brain that his senses were relapsing into their clouded state, and that he would depart this life with the secret untold.

"Do not be in a hurry, my good friend," I said, though scarcely able to subdue my own agonized excitement. "Compose your feelings."

"Oh! but the spectacle is so fearful to gaze upon," he resumed: "for I can see it all *now* as plain as I saw it *then*. Look! a man springs forward from behind a neighbouring clump of trees—he springs upon that gentleman dressed in black—he hurls him to the ground—in a moment a knife is drawn across his throat—and then that man drags the gentleman down the bank into the river. There is a heavy splash—the waters gurgle and ripple—and then they are still again. But, Ah! there is another heavy plunge—it is the man himself who has leapt into the river—he disappears—he is carried away by the tide; for the stream is swollen with the recent rains. All this takes place in a few moments—Oh! so short a time—but little more than the twinkling of an eye. Murder and suicide—murder and suicide!—and there I stand, with feelings so strange—Oh, so strange—I recollect them well—but I cannot describe them. I remember too that the knife lay upon the grass—I stooped to pick it up; but no, no—I could not! It was stained with blood—the blood of that gentleman!"

"Thomas," I said, in a low deep voice, which sounded awfully sepulchral in my own ears—and I felt that I was pale as a ghost—yes, and cold as a corpse—"Thomas, who was the man that murdered—no, *killed* the gentleman?"—for although it may seem, as it really was, a miserable punctilio as to words, yet I could not for the life of me use the word *murdered* then.

"Who was he?" said the poor sufferer, looking earnestly in my face; and at that instant never was the expression of the human countenance more rational than his own: "who was he? Miss Price, I told you to prepare yourself—I told you not to be unhappy—you could not help it—you are not answerable—that man who killed the gentleman and then plunged him into the river—that man—was your father!"

I spoke not a word: the stupor of an awful consternation was upon me. Yet I was not taken by surprise by the revelation I had just received: for it was only the confirmation of a suspicion which had arisen up in my mind some minutes back. Nevertheless, it was a fearful thing for one to be thus told that her own father was a murderer—the slayer of a fellow-creature. I could not doubt the complete accuracy of Tommy's tale: was it not fully confirmed by the narrative which some time back I had heard from the lips of Mr. Tufnell at Sir Aubrey Clavering's house? Yes: the death of the late Sir Wyndham was no longer involved in mystery—at least to me I could penetrate it but too clearly—I could fathom it but too well.

"Miss Price," said the invalid, after a long pause, during which he had lain with his eyes fixed with mournful compassion upon my countenance,—“you are not angry with me that I have told you this? you are not annoyed that I have made you come all the way from London to hear that revelation?”

"Angry!" was my melancholy answer: "no, my good friend—I cannot be angry with you. Heaven

forbid that either by word or look I should aggravate your sufferings!"

"How good and kind you are," he said, the tears trickling down his sunken cheeks. "I do not know why I have told you all this—I do not know why I sent for you: but the moment I began to comprehend all the past, and could recollect that scene in every one of its dreadful details, I felt a kind of necessity to make it known to you. Ah! Miss Price, what would I give had it been good news instead of bad! I have but a few days—perhaps only a few hours to live: but if I had a whole lifetime before me, I would surrender it up all—Ah! and cheerfully too, if I could only have had some pleasing intelligence to impart to you!"

"My poor friend," I answered, my eyes dimmed with tears—for there was something profoundly affecting not merely in the language which he uttered, but in the fact that his mind should thus have become restored to its healthiest tone, and that in this altered state it should cherish towards me the same friendly feeling it had ever been wont to know during the period of its clouded gloom: "my poor friend, I thank you from the very bottom of my heart for everything you have said and for all the good things you have ever done towards me. And as for this sad tale which you have told me to-day, there is a feeling within me—a feeling like a presentiment—making me aware of the importance of the knowledge which has thus reached me: yet how it is to influence my future destiny, I cannot for the moment understand. And now, Tommy, would you like me to remain with you—"

"Until I go hence?" he said, perceiving that I stopped short: then, as a melancholy smile appeared upon his countenance, he went on to observe, "It is a great happiness to me that I have seen you once more in this life. It is a consolation and a solace for which I dared scarcely hope. I feel, Miss Price, that I have always liked you: your words were ever kind to me—But no, you must not remain here. I feel that if you were to stay, I should have my thoughts distracted from subjects on which they ought to settle—"

"But I *will* stay," I said: "I will help Mrs. Jackson's niece to attend upon you—I will read good books to you—"

"No, Miss Price," he interrupted me firmly, "you must not stay. While you are in my presence, I feel that the world is too bright and beautiful for me to leave it without a pang of regret: and it must not be in such a state of mind that I am to go hence. I am dying—I know that I am: but there is a balm in my soul—and it has been poured there by this kind offer you have made to stay with me. There is something in your sweet looks which reminds me of the beautiful fields with the sun shining on them; and when I hear your voice, I think of the music of the gentle birds. It is a pleasure while these impressions last: but they are not fit for the chamber of death. I must shut them out from me—and therefore you must go, Miss Price. Yes, you must go! Oh, if you would let me kiss your hand once—"

That moment did I give him my hand: he just touched it with his lips, and immediately abandoned it. For a few moments he continued silent; and then again said, "Miss Price, you must go—I beseech and implore you to leave me. We shall meet

no more in this world. God Almighty bless you—for you deserve all his choicest gifts!”

I took the poor creature's hand—pressed it warmly in my own—and, half-blinded by my tears, issued from the apartment. I stopped for a little while upon the landing to wipe away those tears and compose my feelings; and then I descended to the parlour, where I found Mr. and Mrs. Jackson and their niece. I told them that I had offered to remain with the dying sufferer, but that he would not allow me; and I besought that every possible care should be taken and attention shown in order to smooth his departure from this world. The assurances I received convinced me that the entreaties I had proffered were altogether unnecessary; and when I proposed, in as delicate a manner as I could, to give money for the present expenses, and those of the funeral which must soon take place, the worthy people whom I thus addressed seemed hurt that I should make such an offer. They insisted that I should partake of refreshments: but I required none—nothing save a glass of water would I accept—and bidding them farewell, I returned to the chaise which was still waiting. I gave no instructions to the post-boy whither to proceed: I forgot that it was at all requisite to do so. Indeed I was in a state of mind, after all I had heard and all I had seen, which rendered it impossible for me to deliberate at once upon the course to be adopted;—and of his own accord the postilion drove into Ashford.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

It cannot be said that I awakened completely from my abstracted mood, until I found myself in a parlour at the *Saracen's Head*, and the worthy landlady mingling her welcomes with expressions of a hope that nothing unpleasant had brought me once again to my native town. I told her that a terrible accident had befallen Mad Tommy, to whom I was so much indebted for my escape from the den of those dreadful men who had suffered at Maidstone that very day, that I had come from London to see the poor fellow; and that there was no chance of his recovery. But of course, with regard to the terrible revelation which had been made to me, I said nothing.

It was now nearly five o'clock in the evening. I felt exhausted with the long journey I had performed and the excitement I had gone through: I likewise experienced the necessity of leisure and rest, in order to deliberate calmly upon the various matters which were agitating in my mind. I therefore decided upon staying at the *Saracen's Head* at least till the morning; and I ordered dinner, more for form's sake than because I had any real appetite. The meal, when it was served up, passed away almost untasted: but I soon after desired some tea to be brought in—and that beverage refreshed me somewhat.

But in what channels were my meditations now flowing? The tale which I had heard from Thomas Dawson's lips—a tale of direst horror—led me more than ever to suspect that my unfortunate father was still alive; and that it was he whom I had seen on two occasions at the gipsies' house in St. Giles's.

I methought that I could now more clearly than ever read the mystery of the past: but therewith was accompanied the sickening, painful, agonizing reflection that the mother whom I had loved so tenderly, and whose memory I had revered so faithfully, was not free from guilt. In short, this is what I imagined: that Sir Wyndham Clavering had been the real object of her affections, although by marriage she was bound to another—that the letter with the black seal had contained unquestionable evidence of her frailty—that my poor father, on reading it, had been driven by frenzy to fly away from his home—that wandering on the bank of the river in the evening of that eventful day, he had overheard the conversation between Mad Tommy and Sir Wyndham Clavering, which conversation at once indicated Sir Wyndham as the destroyer of his happiness—and that under the influence of this same frenzied excitement, he had wreaked a prompt and terrific vengeance upon the author of his dishonour. Then, that my poor father, filled with despair, had plunged into the river in the hope of finding relief from his anguish in a speedy death—but that he had been subsequently rescued by friendly hands,—or else, prompted by that instinctive clinging to life which in deepest danger is felt by us all,—that such was the sequel of the sad story, I no longer had any doubt.

But what was I to do? Should I commence a determined and unwearied search after my unfortunate parent? or ought I to take it for granted that it was *his* wish never more to behold his children? Oh, no—I could not settle my thoughts upon this latter alternative! More than ever did I feel assured that it was no dream when at the gipsies' house I had heard his voice speaking tremulously and in affliction by the death-bed of Robert: and if he were thus moved on that occasion, might not my fond endearments—my filial ministrations—move him still more, and reconcile him to beholding his children again? But then came the torturing thought that perhaps he fancied we were not *his* children; and hence the entire severance which had taken place between him and us for so long a period. Oh! but even if that fearful impression existed in his mind,—was it not still my duty to do my best to discover him, and soothe his bruised and wounded spirit to the best of my power? Yes: I was resolved, immediately on my return to London, to do my best to find out the retreat of that forlorn and disconsolate father: for I felt assured that he was really in existence.

And next, what about the letter with the black seal? Did not that enter largely into my thoughts? did I not ask myself whether I need any longer abstain from perusing its contents? What was the advice which Mr. Collins had left behind? Every word—every syllable of the memorandum penned in his own handwriting upon the envelop, was stamped upon my memory; and I slowly and deliberately repeated them to myself:—“*This contains the letter which Mary Price confided to my care. If she will follow the advice of a true friend, and one who knows the world well, she will not open this packet to read the letter until she be married; or if not married, until she be several years older than she is now. Believing that my end is approaching, I earnestly and affectionately give her this counsel.*”

Ah! methought it was not difficult to comprehend wherefore that kind-hearted man—that worthy Mr. Collins, had given me this advice. He respected the rectitude of my own principles—and he knew full well it would shock them cruelly to read the evidence of a mother's frailty. He knew likewise how profoundly I revered that mother's memory; and with the most generous consideration he had deemed it the saddest thing which could befall a young female to have her faith in a parent's good example impaired or wrecked. But I now felt that the time had come when I must read that letter. Two years and four months had elapsed since Mr. Collins had penned the *memorandum*: but though this interval was but comparatively brief, yet my experience in the world had considerably increased: and much as I might deplore the annihilation of my respect for my mother's example, yet the result could not possibly be morally prejudicial to myself. Besides, if I were determined—as I was—to search for my father, was it not necessary to ascertain the precise nature of the impression which that fatal letter had made upon his mind? And more than this, too—was there not the hope that, after all, it might transpire that though my mother had loved another than him whom she had wedded, yet that she had retained herself sinless? Alas! circumstances scarcely seemed to warrant this hope: and yet it was natural that a daughter should entertain it—a daughter who had loved her mother so adoringly, so reverently!

But not to trouble the reader with any farther details of the reflections which passed through my mind at the *Saracen's Head*, it will now be sufficient to state that they resulted in two resolves. The first was to search for my father: the second was to read the letter with the black seal immediately on my return to London. And now I debated with myself whether I should go home by Maidstone or Canterbury. The wish had taken me in the morning to call and pay my respects to Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin: but that would only delay me—and I was now so anxious to return to the metropolis. Besides the hideous scene I had witnessed at Maidstone that day, filled me with a dread horror of the place; and I decided upon taking the Canterbury route. Accordingly, on the following morning I rose very early—soon after six o'clock—and despatched a mounted messenger from the hotel to Farmer Jackson's to make a last inquiry concerning poor Thomas Dawson. At eight the emissary returned: and the moment he entered the room where I was seated, I read the answer in his looks. Nor was I mistaken. Poor Tommy had died during the night.

It was with a deep depression of spirits that I entered a post-chaise to take me across to Canterbury. I fell into a profound reverie, from which I did not awaken until the vehicle entered the town of Wye, in the neighbourhood of which, as the reader will remember, was situated the house of Mr. Twisden. Ah! full well did I recollect how upwards of six years back—when a poor girl, flung upon the world to earn her own bread—I had first presented myself at Twisden Lodge, and had there found my first place! I looked from the window of the chaise in the direction of the Lodge, and beheld the tall chimneys high above the orchard-trees, whose branches were in this winter season denuded of all vernal covering. But while I was thus gazing

in that direction, I heard the postilion shout to some persons to get out of the way: and flinging my looks forward, whom should I behold but the very persons of whom I was thinking at the moment? Yes: there where Mr. and Mrs. Twisden, evidently taking an early walk, and accompanied by their three children.

"Why, there's Mary Price, I declare!" ejaculated Mrs. Twisden: and the postilion, finding that I was thus recognized, instinctively reined in his horses.

"Well, Mary, is it indeed you?" said the good-natured old gentleman: and dropping his wife's arm, he rushed up to the post-chaise, opened the door, and gave me a cordial shake of the hand. He was now seventy years of age; his hair was as white as snow—but his face was as red and as benevolent-looking as ever; and he was dressed in his brown knee-breeches and gaiters, just as I had always seen him.

"Mr. Twisden, Mr. Twisden!" querulously screamed forth his wife: "what do you mean by such conduct as this, sir? Leaving me and these dear children standing in the middle of the road!"

"Well, but how are you, Mary?" said the old gentleman, not heeding the lady. "You have grown quite a splendid young woman."

"Mr. Twisden, I am ashamed of you," now literally yelled forth his virago of a wife.

Meanwhile I had descended from the chaise in order to speak to the children; and when Mrs. Twisden perceived that I was dressed in a manner which, though I flatter myself totally devoid of pretension, was yet sufficiently superior to indicate no mean improvement in my condition, she looked a little more amiable—or at all events, a little less wrathful. She seemed surprised also: and as she observed I was travelling in a post-chaise as well as being dressed in a lady-like manner, she no doubt thought it better not to show too much of her airs towards me. But still she could not be altogether pleasant: and so she said in a half-sneering tone, "Might I ask what brings *Miss Price* into these parts again?"

But in the meantime I had shaken hands with Gustavus, who was an ill-looking dwarfish boy of sixteen—and with Miss Miranda, who was a vulgar forward girl of twelve. But when I approached Master Dickey, who was now seven, he made a hideous face at me; and rushing behind his mother, nearly tore the shawl off her back—a little exploit which was promptly acknowledged on her part with a very sound box on the ears.

"Pray don't beat the child, my dear," said Mr. Twisden: "it's only his play."

"His play indeed!" she ejaculated, while Master Dickey began dancing, and capering, and shaking himself in a furious passion: "don't talk to me about his play! It's all your fault, Mr. Twisden; you indulge the children too much—you bring them up in a way that makes the house quite unbearable."

"It isn't the only thing," muttered the old gentleman, "that makes the house unbearable."

"What is that you said?" ejaculated Mrs. Twisden: and she looked daggers at her husband.

"Only that you, my dear," he responded meekly, "do all you possibly can to make the house bearable."



Mrs. Twisden contemplated him for a moment in a very suspicious manner, as if she did not believe he had given her the true version of his previous remark: then turning to me, she said again, "Well, *Miss Price*"—accentuating the words printed in *italic*—"what has brought you into this neighbourhood?"

"I was summoned to Ashford on account of the severe illness of a person in whom I felt much interest."

"Summoned—eh? From London, I suppose? And did you travel post the whole way?" asked Mrs. Twisden.

"I did," was my response; and then she looked very hard at me again, as if not able to understand the change which had evidently taken place in my position.

"I hope you are well off and happy, Mary," said the old gentleman, with a benevolent look.

"You should call her *Miss Price*," exclaimed

Mrs. Twisden: "for don't you see she is *quite* the lady now?"—and she gave a toss of her head.

"Didn't she use to be our nursemaid, ma?" inquired Miss Miranda.

"Why, to be sure she did," observed Master Gustavus, in a coarse vulgar manner. "I should think so! And didn't she give herself airs? and didn't she order us not to run about on the grass in wet weather?"

"For shame, Gustavus," cried Mr. Twisden, with more sternness than I could have fancied him capable of displaying. "There never was a kinder-hearted person beneath our roof than Mary——"

"Not even excepting your wife, I suppose?" interjected the lady, with a most vinegar aspect and in the acerbest tone.

"Present company always excepted, my dear," answered the old gentleman.

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden. Your compliments are worse than your insults. Gustavus,

come away from the horses! Miraada, don't stare so at the post-boy's boots! Dickey, leave off crying directly! I insist upon it, you troublesome little dog, you!"—and by way of enforcing her command, she bestowed another box on the ear, which only set him yelling, and screaming, and capering, and jumping more furiously than before: but heedless of this, she turned again to me, saying, "Are you going straight back to London?"

"I am," was my reply.

"To post it all the way?"

"No: it is my intention to take the stage-coach at Canterbury."

"And pray, may I ask where you are in London? and what you are doing?"

"Oh, certainly. I am living with a young lady of fortune—but what is better still of amiability and kindness, and who treats me like a sister. Indeed, in all respects I am regarded in that light by her."

"Oh! as for amiability," ejaculated Mrs. Twisden, with a most vixenish look at her husband, "all women would be amiable—it's in their nature to be so: but it's the men who will not let them."

"The men, then, my dear," suggested the old gentleman mildly, "must be very great fools to put such rods in pickle for themselves."

"Ah! but they do, though!" retorted the lady, with a fierce glance at her husband: "and the better pickle the rods are in, the more richly do they deserve them:"—then again turning to me, she said in a milder tone and with gentler manner, "Well, Miss Price, since you have become a lady at last, it won't do to talk of by-gone affairs. I presume you are moving now quite in a high circle, and ride in a carriage?"

"Miss Maitland certainly keeps a carriage, of which I have the use," I answered, well pleased to observe that the independent air I had put on towards that ill-conditioned woman had cowed her somewhat: "but as for high society, we see scarcely any company at all."

"I and Mr. Twisden are thinking of coming up to London in the Spring," she observed; "and we should like to call upon your Miss Maitland: for we know nobody in town—and it would be very dull indeed to have no means of getting into society."

"Well, but, my dear," interposed her husband in a voice of gentle deprecation, "you hear that Miss Maitland receives no visitors."

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden. She will receive us. Miss Price will make us welcome. And now, Miss Price," she continued, no longer emphasizing my name in a contemptuous manner, "will you order your chaise to be put up at the inn and come as far as the Lodge with us to take some refreshment?"

"If you would, Mary," said Mr. Twisden, "you shall have the best and kindest welcome:"—and his look showed that the words came from his heart. I however declined the invitation—urging as an excuse my anxiety to reach London with the least possibly delay; and the old gentleman again shook me most warmly by the hand.

"That will do, Mr. Twisden," interposed his wife: "you will shake her hand completely off. By the bye, Miss Price, you could do me a great service, if you would in London," she continued: and then

she went on to give me a description of a particular sort of shawl which had recently come into fashion, and which she very much longed to have. "The fact is, none of the linendrapers in Canterbury seem to understand it. I went over there for three days running, and looked at every shawl they possessed that came at all near the fashion I mean: but none would suit. One mercer sent up to London and got some on purpose for me to select from: but nothing would do."

"And uncommon glum they looked when you went away without buying," muttered Mr. Twisden: but it was in that sort of *aside* which is adopted on the stage—namely, loud enough to be overheard.

"What is that, Mr. Twisden?" at once demanded his irritable better half.

"I was only saying, my dear, that I felt quite glum at your disappointment when you found there was nothing worth buying."

"Well, Miss Price," continued the lady, who had grown execrably civil since she had begun to talk of the shawl and meant to foist the commission upon me; "I hope you will not forget this little favour I ask you. It won't come to more than ten or twelve guineas: and if you will send me the bill, I will remit you the amount."

"Perhaps I had better give Mary the money at once," said the old gentleman, beginning to feel for his purse.

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden—and let me make my own arrangements."

I promised the lady to execute her commission: whereupon she contrived to look really amiable for the space of three whole seconds, shaking me by the hand at the same time. I re-entered the post-chaise, Mr. Twisden having the kindness to close the door; for the postilion had remained upon his horse throughout the preceding colloquy, which had occupied about twenty minutes. But scarcely was I ensconced inside the vehicle again, when a loud cry from Master Dickey rang through the air. He had tumbled into a ditch by the side of the road; and just as his mother had dragged him out, covered with mud from his waist downward, the postilion cracked his whip and I was whirled away from the scene. I have no doubt whatever—although I did not see the infliction—that Master Dickey underwent another ear-boxing process on the part of Mrs. Twisden, whose temper appeared to be worse, if possible, than ever.

On arriving at Canterbury, the chaise drove to the *Rose Inn*, where the London stages stopped; and as I was very cold and had eaten nothing for breakfast, I alighted to take some refreshment. But just as I stepped from the vehicle, I heard myself addressed by name, and was instantaneously accosted by Mr. Tufnell, Sir Aubrey Clavering's steward. He was very glad to see me, shaking me cordially by the hand: and finding that I was going to stop until the coach arrived from Dover on its way to London, he asked to be permitted to accompany me into the private sitting-room to which a waiter was about to conduct me. I of course gave my assent; and after the interchange of a few observations, he began to talk about his master. I told him that I had heard all that related to Sir Aubrey, Lady Davenant, and Captain Tollemache, as I was at Herno Bay when the horse-whipping scene took place—that I had likewise heard of the duel, and

that Sir Aubrey had lost his right arm—but I did not say from what quarter these particulars had reached me: nor did Mr. Tufnell inquire.

"You will perhaps be surprised to hear, Miss Price," he said, not thinking that I could be already aware of at least a portion of what he was about to tell me, "that Sir Aubrey Clavering has become quite an altered man. Since that affair of the duel he has resided altogether at the Hall, and has never remained away from it a single day. He seldom comes into Canterbury; and I transact all his business for him, even to the minutest details. He sees little company—inviting none of his own accord—and only receiving those visitors who call from time to time for courtesy's sake. Indeed, he appears to shun the world. Between you and me, Miss Price, it was first of all through mortified vanity. The chastisement he received from Captain Tolle-mache humbled him much; and though he at once sought what the world calls 'the satisfaction of a gentleman,' yet the duel constituting this satisfaction only led to more humiliating results. He lost his arm, as you already knew. If he had been horribly disfigured in the face, maimed in every limb, and altered into a monster, he would not have felt it more. But upon that sense of humiliation followed a creeping and insidious malady, to the true nature of which he endeavoured to blind himself for a time, but which at length forced itself on his conviction. Then, too, his medical attendants, on being questioned, gave their corroborating opinions. In short, Sir Aubrey Clavering is in a decline. He may linger for two or three years—but not more. Ah! Miss Price, he is now paying the penalty for a career of dissipation and pleasure!"

"A rumour of Sir Aubrey Clavering's indisposition reached my ears; and I regret to find it confirmed from your lips."

"It is generous of you to say so," rejoined Mr. Tufnell, "considering that you have no very good reason to speak well of Sir Aubrey Clavering. But I can assure you, he is now an object calculated to inspire pity only. His spirits are wretched. He seems bitterly to repent his past follies, which have only tended to abridge his life so fearfully. The enjoyment of pleasure is gone: the sense of bitterness remains behind. He is growing religious and charitable: he is evidently afraid of death—he dares not look it in the face. Miss Price, I can assure you the man is to be pitied!"

"Then not for a moment," I exclaimed, "do I harbour an angry thought with regard to him. If ever he should happen to mention my name, you may tell him, Mr. Tufnell, that I pardon him from the very bottom of my soul!"

"He has mentioned your name on several occasions within the last two or three months. I have heard him say aloud, but in a musing tone, that he wonders what has become of you?—and he has expressed a hope that you are doing well. But you look surprised that he should thus speak of you?"

"I am surprised that he should recollect a humble individual like myself; but at the same time I am glad to hear that he thinks remorsefully upon the ill he at one time endeavoured to work me?"—and as I thus spoke, I was not merely thinking of his having had me carried off in Derbyshire, and

the scenes which took place at the White Cottage, but also of his treacherous meanness in writing the anonymous letters concerning Eustace and myself.

"You possess a very generous heart, I must repeat, Miss Price," said Tufnell. "But, by the bye, I will tell you a strange thing that occurred. You remember that I gave you an account, when you were at the Hall, of the mysterious death of poor Sir Wyndham——"

"Yes, yes," I said, a cold tremor shooting through my entire form: for that death was no longer a mystery to me—and if I had chosen I could have told the worthy steward that at this very moment he was addressing the daughter of the man who took Sir Wyndham Clavering's life. But this was a secret which I dared not breathe: for I would not brand my father, whether living or dead, as a murderer.

"Ah! it was indeed a shocking affair," observed Tufnell, of course not comprehending the real cause that made me shudder. "But I was going to tell you something strange. You recollect that picture-gallery where you and I had some conversation together? Well, about three or four months ago, I gave orders—for Sir Aubrey leaves everything to me, and looks after nothing himself,—I gave orders, I say, to have that picture-gallery fresh painted and decorated: because it had not been done up for a long time. I myself superintended the taking down of the pictures and their removal to an apartment where they were to remain temporarily while the gallery was being renovated. It was during the removal of that very portrait which so much interested you—the portrait of poor Sir Wyndham himself—that I discovered a panel in the wainscot, opening with a secret spring, and having a recess behind. I had never known it before: I had never even entertained the slightest suspicion of its existence. The fact is, the nail to which the portrait was suspended, had by some means or another got so bent upward, that the cord could not be lifted off it: so the carpenter had to draw out the nail with the pincers. In so doing, he dislodged the panel sufficiently to show that it was moveable. I had it taken down completely, and thus discovered the recess in the wall itself. But that was not all: for in this recess there was a bundle of papers, perfectly well preserved—for neither dust nor damp could reach them there. Of course I did not examine them—although on the endorsement of one I recognized the hand-writing of the late Sir Wyndham Clavering. I took them straight to Sir Aubrey; and for the rest of that day he remained occupied in their perusal. I have not the slightest idea what their contents could be: he did not utter a word upon the subject—but locked them very carefully in his own desk; and for some days afterwards he continued exceeding moody and thoughtful. On several occasions since, I have seen him examine those papers, which appeared to consist almost entirely of letters: but never once has he spoken a single word to me concerning them. The gallery has been repainted and newly decorated—the portraits and pictures themselves have been put back into their places—and if you were pleased with the general effect the last time you were there, you would really admire it now."

"I was indeed much interested by inspecting those pictures," I observed.

"Ah! I recollect another little incident, which in the way of conversation I may as well tell you," said Mr. Tufnell. "When all the arrangements were completed in the gallery,—the painters, carpenters, and gilders gone, and all the pictures suspended with new cords to the walls,—I requested Sir Aubrey to pay a visit to the place that I might ascertain whether he was satisfied with what had been done. He assented: and I attended him thither. He invariably speaks now in a sort of dull apathetic manner; and therefore I did not expect any large amount of praise to issue from his lips in respect to the renovation of the gallery. We threaded it together: he said he was satisfied—and I was contented. On reaching the end, he gazed for a few minutes in silence on the portrait of Lady Clavering, Sir Wyndham's mother—you recollect it?"

"Yes—full well," I answered, with an inward shudder, and also with a momentary revival of that vague terror which I had experienced at the time when contemplating the wild and fearful beauty of the portrait to which Mr. Tufnell was alluding.

"Well," he continued, "Sir Aubrey Clavering gazed upon it for a few minutes; and then turning abruptly round towards me, he said, 'Tufnell, that was a vile bad woman in her lifetime.' I made some remark, slightly of an interrogatory character: for my curiosity was excited. But he said nothing more, and walked slowly out of the gallery. For many long years I had suspected that there was some strange mystery connected with the late Lady Clavering, Sir Wyndham's mother; and then it struck me that Sir Aubrey had only recently discovered what it was—and perhaps through those papers which were found in the recess."

"You do not happen to know," I asked, though scarcely expecting to receive any positive information in reply to my query, "what has become of that Captain Tollemache?"

"Yes: I heard something of him a few days ago," replied Tufnell. "It was entirely by accident—But you look distressed? Is anything the matter?"—and the worthy man spoke in such kind tones, even with a sort of paternal feeling towards me, that I could not help telling him wherefore I was thus profoundly moved.

"Alas, Mr. Tufnell," I said, in a tremulous and broken voice, "I have a sister—a beautiful young creature—but vain, giddy, and thoughtless—It was she whom you saw with me at the Hall—"

"Ah! she *was* a beautiful creature," he observed. "I think you called her Sarah? But what of her? is it possible that the villain Tollemache—Yes: I see that it is so! Do not weep, Miss Price: for you yourself are good—and if your sister had followed your example, it would not be thus with her now. Ah! I recollect," he ejaculated, as a thought appeared to strike him: "the same informant who told me that Captain Tollemache was at Brighton, likewise mentioned that he was accompanied by a beautiful creature who passed as his wife."

"Then they are at Brighton!" I exclaimed, rejoiced in one sense—namely, in having at length ascertained their place of abode.

"But, by the bye, when I bethink me," said Mr. Tufnell, "I learnt that Captain Tollemache did not intend to make a very long stay at Brighton. It appears he recently came in for a considerable sum

of money, and purposes making a tour on the Continent."

"Ah!" I ejaculated: for the intelligence I had just received, seemed all in a moment to change my plans. "I must not go to London to-day—it is absolutely necessary I should hasten after my sister. Oh, that I may be enabled to rescue her from that unprincipled man! But I fear—I fear the endeavour will be useless—and yet it must be made: for she is my sister!"

My resolve being thus speedily taken, I rang the bell and desired the waiter to order me a post-chaise to take me to Brighton. I then wrote a letter to Laura Maitland, telling her wherefore I was thus extending my journey and likewise prolonging my absence from London—but promising to return to her as speedily as possible. I also wrote to Sybilla, acquainting her with my absence, and begging her to call upon Miss Maitland, lest she should feel dull and lonely. By the time these letters were finished, the post-chaise was in readiness. I took leave of Mr. Tufnell, who himself volunteered to take those letters to the post; and I was soon being whirled along towards the southern coast of England.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE HOTEL AT BRIGHTON.

It was eleven at night when the post-chaise entered the town of Brighton. I directed the postilion to take me to a respectable hotel—not by any means intending that he should put an exaggerated interpretation upon my words, and bear me off to a first-rate one. This however he did; and the equipage rolled up to the door of one of the most fashionable in the town. This I did not of course discover at the time, being a perfect stranger in Brighton: but when I alighted and beheld by the flare of the flaming gas-lamps the spacious and imposing edifice—and when three or four waiters hurried forth to receive me—I was struck by a misgiving that my directions had not been fulfilled in the way I had intended. But it was too late to retreat; and I accordingly entered the sumptuous hotel. The landlady appeared in the hall; and without asking whether I required a private sitting-room, forthwith conducted me to one. Wax-candles were lighted upon the mantel; and while a chambermaid came to know whether I would like to see my room at once, a waiter requested to be informed what I would take for supper?

I was confused and bewildered by all these manifold attentions. I really had not the courage to answer that all I required was a bed-chamber: so I ordered some refreshment—and being very cold with my long journey of so many hours through the bleak wintry season, I was glad to sit down by the cheerful fire blazing in the grate. I now began to notice that the mistress of the hotel, who was most sumptuously dressed, had lingered in the room, and was regarding me with considerable attention. No doubt she was surprised that if I could afford to travel post, I had no female attendant; and perhaps she thought there was something suspicious in the proceeding.—although, from habit, she had at once overwhelmed me with civilities the moment I set foot in the hotel.

"I presume, Miss—ma'am," she said, half hesitating, and evidently not knowing exactly how to address me, "you expect to find some friends at Brighton?"

"I have certainly come hither," was my response, "to see some one—indeed, my sister?"—and I was about to mention the name of Mrs. Tollemache, when I caught back the words ere uttered; for I did not know what kind of reputation Captain Tollemache might bear at Brighton, and how I might compromise myself by appearing to be at all connected with him.

"Oh, your sister?" said the landlady, still very polite, but evidently not entirely satisfied nor pleased.

"I presume then she is resident in the town? Would you like a message to be sent to her? for people keep late hours at Brighton, and it is not too late to forward such intelligence if you wish it."

"No—not to-night, I thank you," was my answer, given half confusedly, half abstractedly; for I really did begin to feel somewhat uncomfortable, and experienced the awkwardness of my position as a young female travelling alone.

"Just as you please," observed the landlady, now only coldly civil: and she quitted the room. Almost immediately afterwards two waiters made their appearance—the table was quickly spread—and several dishes were placed upon it. A repast, consisting of divers delicacies, was served up: but I scarcely eat a mouthful; and when I had finished, I requested the chamber-maid to be summoned that I might go to bed: for I was thoroughly exhausted—indeed, almost sinking with fatigue. The chamber-maid soon came; and she conducted me to a room which though on one of the highest floors, was very elegantly furnished.

"I am obliged to give you this chamber, Miss," she said, lingering in the room after she had deposited the wax candle upon the toilet-table, "because the house is so full. I don't remember Brighton being so gay for many a long year at this season. Such a number of the nobility! We have got the Earl of Chilstone and his family staying in the house. They are such nice people. I am told that his lordship is an Admiral in the Navy, and has not long come into the title and estates. The Countess of Chilstone is such a good-natured kind-hearted creature—and all Countess though she is, gives as little trouble as possible. They have their son with them—Lord Egerton—such a fine handsome young man!"

"I do not require any farther attendance," I now said, cutting short the woman's garrulity: for I was not only most anxious to seek my couch—but I likewise saw that she was only endeavouring to inveigle me into conversation that I might tell her something regarding myself. She accordingly withdrew in pursuance of the hint I gave her; and I lost no time in retiring to rest. Notwithstanding I had so many various things agitating in my mind, sleep soon fell upon my eyes; and I slumbered soundly until the morning. On awaking, I recollected the observations which the landlady had made the preceding evening; and I began seriously to deliberate whether I should not do well to remove at once to some less grand and fashionable establishment, where no particular notice would be taken of me. But then I thought that as I had plenty of money to pay my bill, I had no right to be made

the subject of curiosity; and also that as it was not likely I should remain there very long—perhaps indeed not more than a single day—it would be foolish to lose time by shifting my quarters. So I resolved to stay where I was; and when my toilet was completed, I descended to the sitting-room where I had supped on my arrival. The table was spread for breakfast: I rang the bell—the repast was served up—and when it was concluded, the landlady made her appearance.

She was very polite and very civil, but evidently had a settled purpose in her mind. She began by expressing a hope that I had found my chamber comfortable, and that everything had given me satisfaction; and when I had answered in the affirmative, she said, "Is it your intention, Miss—ma'am—to make any long stay? for the house is so full, and we have received so many letters from London desiring that apartments might be kept for families——"

"If you mean," said I, now feeling truly indignant, "that you wish to dispose of my rooms to other guests, say so at once—give me my bill—and I will take my departure. There are no doubt other hotels in Brighton where I shall be made welcome and comfortable."

"Pray don't take offence, Miss," hastily replied the landlady: "only this is a family hotel—and families, you know, are so exceedingly particular——"

"And if," I again interrupted her, "I had arrived in my own carriage, with a host of servants, you would not have addressed me thus. For my own sake I must tell you that my character is by no means calculated to impair the reputation of your establishment: and now, having said this, I will go elsewhere. Have the kindness to send me up my bill at once."

With these words I walked out of the room, for the purpose of ascending to the bed-chamber to pack up my box. But scarcely had I set foot on the landing, when the presence of three persons who were at the moment coming down the staircase, elicited an ejaculation of mingled joy and surprise from my lips. Yes: I recognized them directly!—that fine, tall, stout gentleman, with his good-humoured red face—his light blue eyes, full of merriment—and his apparel consisting of the blue coat with anchor buttons, the buff waistcoat, and the hessian boots;—that lady too, whose countenance beamed with benevolence—and that tall, slender, handsome young man, with his chestnut hair—his fine blue eyes—and the same candour of look and manner which characterized his parents. And they recognized me too; and in an instant both my hands were caught in the most friendly clasp by the father and mother—and then came the turn of the son to give me an equally cordial greeting.

"Why, Mary, what are you doing here?" exclaimed the old gentleman. "I am as glad to see you as I am sure my wife and son are. Who are you with? when did you come? how long are you going to stay?"

"She cannot answer all these questions in a moment," said the worthy lady, laughing. "Come along with us, Mary:"—and she led me into a most sumptuously furnished drawing-room, her husband and son following close behind.

"My dear Mrs. Calder," I said, "this is truly

an agreeable surprise for me!"—and recollecting all the kindness I had received at her hands, I could not help embracing her. She pressed me with a truly maternal warmth to her bosom; and then her husband shook me again by the hand—and her son, following the father's example, said at the same time, "We are indeed rejoiced to meet you once more." But as he thus spoke, the colour went and came upon his countenance in rapid transitions—mingled delight and confusion were in his looks—and I could not help observing, too, that the anxiety of hope was glistening there also!

"Sit down, Mary," said the old gentleman: "you are not with strangers—you know you are with friends. Sit down, my dear girl. It is a very odd thing that it was only last night we resolved to write to you and tell you we had come back to England: for we knew where you were—or at least we thought we did—But is your friend, Miss Maitland, with you here at Brighton?"

"See how astonished the dear girl looks!" exclaimed the worthy lady, again laughing good-humouredly. "She can't fancy how we know so much about her. Why, my dear Mary, a few days ago we were at Walmer, and were introduced to your friends the Kingstons; and somehow or another your name happened to be mentioned—But I need tell you no more: I dare say you are pretty well satisfied that the good-hearted Squire and his handsome wife did not give you a *very* bad character. My poor girl," she continued, her tone suddenly changing, "we know why you are in mourning—and we sympathize with you. But still there is in your circumstances much that caused us great rejoicing: for we know the position in which you stand now—one indeed to which your own merits have raised you."

"But come, tell us," exclaimed the old gentleman; "is Miss Maitland here with you? or are you all alone?"

"All alone," I responded; "and truly glad I am, for more reasons than one, that I have encountered you. I was about to leave the hotel—the landlady had been speaking to me in a way that I did not like, as if on account of being alone I was not a proper character to come to her house."

"By Jove, this is too bad!"—and the old gentleman at once pulled the bell violently.

"Oh! pray say nothing upon the subject, Captain Calder!" I cried. "It is past and ended now. I feel no animosity towards the landlady: I was merely explaining one reason for which I was so glad to have fallen in with you—for I know that it *does* appear suspicious, or at least singular, for a young female to come alone and unattended to a great establishment like this."

"Still," remarked Edward, "you ought to have been treated courteously:"—and I now noticed that his countenance was fired with indignation at the conduct I had experienced. Yet even through that indignation there was a beaming of subdued tenderness in the look which he bent upon me.

At this moment the door opened, and a waiter entered the room.

"Tell the landlady I want to speak to her," said the veteran officer, with more sternness in his tone than I thought him capable of displaying.

"Yes, my lord," was the reply: and the waiter, bowing low, quitted the apartment.

Ah! that mode of address suddenly became a revelation for me. All in an instant the account which the chambermaid had given on the preceding evening, of the Earl and Countess of Chilstone, and their son Lord Egerton, flashed to my mind; and I now comprehended the change which had taken place in the social position of my former friends. But as I began to look very serious—thinking that I had shown a great deal of undue familiarity in embracing the Countess—I found my hand suddenly caught in her warm grasp; and with another good-humoured laugh, she said, "Well, my dear girl, though our names are a little altered, we are still just the same towards you; and if on account of old reminiscences you like to call me Mrs. Calder, pray do. But at least you must make the Earl an Admiral instead of a Captain: for the former is now his naval rank."

The landlady of the hotel entered the room at this instant—and very frightened were her looks. She had seen what had taken place on the landing—how cordially I was greeted by the Earl and Countess of Chilstone, and by Lord Egerton; and she now beheld me with my hand clasped in that of her ladyship, who at the moment, with her other hand, was smoothing down my hair in an affectionate and caressing manner. Full well understanding for what purpose she had been summoned thither, the landlady commenced a perfect catalogue of excuses, apologies, and entreaties for forgiveness, addressing herself to each and all of us in turn.

"I can tell you what it is," said the Earl, pacing to and fro with his hands behind him as if walking on the quarter-deck of a man-of-war, "it is very lucky that Miss Price interceded for you before you entered the room—or else we would have quitted the hotel at once. At all events, it will be a lesson which you will remember another time."

The landlady declared that she should never forget it; and after a fresh tissue of apologies and excuses, she curtsied and left the room.

"Now, my dear Mary," said the Countess, "if it be no secret, tell us what has brought you to Brighton. But you look distressed? Pray do not say a word upon the subject if it will grieve you: and yet allow me to express a hope that it is on account of nothing very unpleasant?"

In a few words, mingled with many tears, I explained to my kind friends enough of the circumstances connected with my erring sister Sarah to make them comprehend that I had sought Brighton in the hope of rescuing her from her present connexion. They were all three profoundly grieved to hear that I had such a serious cause for distress, and proffered their assistance in any way that it could be rendered available.

"I tell you how we will manage it," said the Earl of Chilstone,—“for I am sure Mary may leave herself in our hands and be guided by us in the matter. Edward and I will go out at once and inquire at the libraries and other resorts where this Captain Tollemache lives; and then, my dear,” he added, turning to his wife, “you and Mary can go together and endeavour to see this poor erring girl.”

"That I will!" exclaimed the Countess; "and I will speak to her as if I were her mother. Anything will I do for our dear Mary's sake."

"Well then, Edward and I will go at once," said

the Earl; "and we will leave you two together—for I dare say you will find plenty to talk about."

The Earl of Chilstone and Lord Egerton accordingly took their departure; but as the latter turned upon the threshold of the door, I could not avoid noticing that he bent a look upon me the nature of which was unmistakable. It was perfectly respectful: indeed, he was incapable of behaving otherwise; but there was also mingled admiration and tenderness, hope and fear, in that look—and when the door closed behind him, a feeling of sadness took possession of my soul. I saw that Edward still entertained an affection for me; I feared likewise that finding me still unmarried, hope had revived within him; and now I began deeply to regret—but for this reason only—that I had encountered these kind friends whose acquaintance I had first made in Derbyshire. The Countess perceived that shade which came over my features: she had perceived also that lingering look which her son fixed upon me; and *her* countenance likewise grew serious.

"My dear Mary," she said, "I will not pretend to be ignorant of what is passing in your mind. But I will ask you a question. That engagement of which you so candidly and honourably spoke to us at Derby—does it still exist?"

"My heart, dear lady," was my response, "still cherishes the same image;"—for I could not under existing circumstances affirm that the engagement itself was on the same footing as when I had spoken of it in Derbyshire.

"Enough, Mary!" said the Countess, pressing my hand almost convulsively, as if she could have wished that it had been otherwise and sorrowed that it was not: "I will not attempt to penetrate farther into your secrets. Thank heaven! our dear son's health is perfectly restored—and I had hoped that he had also conquered the attachment he experienced for you. It is no ill compliment that I mean; because heaven knows, if your affections were disengaged, how cheerfully the Earl and myself would consent to receive you as a daughter-in-law. Our hearts are not changed together with our fortunes: but when I say that 'twas my hope Edward had succeeded in subduing the warm love he felt for you, it is because I see how vainly it has been cherished—and I therefore speak as a mother deeply solicitous for the welfare of her son. Alas! this hopeless love is not extinct in his breast——"

"Oh, my lady!" I exclaimed painfully excited as well as deeply affected: "let me depart hence at once, ere your noble-hearted son returns. It were cruel for me to remain here!"

"Not so, Mary," interposed the Countess, mildly but firmly. "Edward must learn to meet you in the world as a friend. I will take a speedy opportunity of acquainting him with the conversation which we are now having together: he is incapable of looking upon you otherwise than with respect; and should your own love prove happy and prosperous—as God grant it may, when you become the honoured wife of him to whom you are pledged—Edward will regard you as a sister. You are aware that he possesses the most magnanimous disposition; and he has reached that age when he is fully capable of comprehending the necessity of controlling his feelings."

I was cheered and encouraged by these assurances:

but at the same time I gave her ladyship to understand that it was my intention to hurry back to London the moment I had seen the issue of the hoped-for interview with my sister.

"And now," resumed the Countess, adopting her wonted gaiety of look and manner, "I dare say you are anxious to learn how it came about that you find us invested with these sounding titles: for to tell you the truth, Mary, I am not a bit happier with mine than I was when plain Mrs. Calder. But then, I am always happy, you know—or at least, contented. Well, I must inform you that my husband had a cousin who possessed the Earldom of Chilstone; and he had a son—the heir-apparent to the title and estates: therefore you may suppose that we never entertained the remotest idea of succeeding thereto. The old Earl died three years ago—and his son succeeded him. Fourteen months back—for we are only just out of mourning—the young Earl was thrown from his horse while riding a steeple-chase for an immense wager, and was killed on the spot. Thus all in a moment plain Admiral Calder, with a moderate income, became converted into the Earl of Chilstone with a very large one."

"Although you yourself set so little value," I observed, "upon the title which your ladyship has obtained, the possession of accompanying wealth is nevertheless a matter of congratulation, inasmuch as it will enable you to do so much good. I know your generous heart, dear lady, and feel assured that riches cannot be in better hands."

After a little more conversation, the Countess suddenly observed, "By the bye, Mary, we read in the newspaper of the loves and adventures of your old friend Miss Nibkins of Derby. Heaven forgive me for laughing at the misfortunes of any one: but really there was something so indescribably ludicrous in the whole affair, that it was impossible to avoid some little degree of merriment."

In about an hour the Earl of Chilstone and Lord Egerton returned. On going forth they had be thought themselves of instituting their inquiries with the Master of the Ceremonies in the first instance; and from that gentleman they at once obtained the information they sought. It appeared that Captain Tollemache and a lady who passed for his wife, were residing in one of the handsome ready-furnished houses on the Marine Parade; but that they did not mix in the fashionable society of Brighton, the character of Captain Tollemache being known as that of a depraved and dishonest person.

"Under these circumstances," said Lord Chilstone, addressing himself to his wife, "it would not be advisable for you and Mary to proceed thither in the carriage: it would probably become rumoured all over Brighton that we were intimate with this Tollemache—so that he would at once be taken by the hand and get into good society, which I should be very sorry for him to do through our means. Edward and I will escort you both within sight of the house; and you can pay this visit in as private a manner as possible."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it may be putting your ladyship to an inconvenience, or inflicting upon you a painful task——"

"No, my dear girl," she interrupted me with her wonted kindness: "if you like me to go with

you, I shall consider it to be a duty. Come, let us proceed to our chambers and put on our things: we will then go forth together. Though cold, the weather appears to be exceedingly beautiful; and a little walk will do us good."

The Countess and I left the apartment; and as we ascended the staircase, she said in a subdued voice, "You had better linger ten minutes or so, dear Mary, before you join us again in the sitting-room. I will take that opportunity of saying a few words to my dear Edward. By the bye, would you like to have the attendance of a maid while you remain at this hotel?—for I have two female servants with me, and one shall cheerfully be placed at your disposal."

I thanked the Countess of Chilstone for this considerate offer, but declined it—adding with a smile, "that I was not quite such a flimsy lady yet as to need such attendance; nor had I forgotten the humble position which I had occupied until so recent a date." But as I ascended to the chamber where I had slept the previous night, and which was two storeys higher than that which the Countess occupied, I met the chamber-maid; and with an air of profound respect, she said, "Miss Price, I have taken your things to another room—a much better and more commodious one than that which you occupied last night." She then conducted me to this new apartment; and I could not help thinking as I followed her thither, upon the hollowness and artificiality of the world, seeing that the fact of my acquaintance with an aristocratic family had so suddenly produced a marked change in my position within the walls of that hotel. I suffered half-an-hour to elapse ere I returned to the sitting-room; and the moment I entered, the Countess said, "Now, Mary, we are ready."

She evidently spoke thus to hurry our departure that she might save both her son and myself as much as possible from the embarrassment which she naturally supposed we might feel after the communication which she had just been making to him. We issued forth from the room: the Countess took her husband's arm—Lord Egerton offered me his. His manner was that of a sincere friend: but I could not help noticing that there was a certain degree of mournfulness in his look, although he was evidently doing his best to conceal it. For the first few moments I did feel embarrassed—indeed, excessively awkward; but I saw the necessity of conquering this restraint and reciprocating that friendly frankness with which Edward on the other hand was endeavouring to treat me. From my very soul I pitied this amiable and excellent young man, who had cherished for me, throughout a lengthened period, an affection that was so sincere, so genuine, but yet was doomed to be so hopeless.

The town of Brighton is perhaps one of the handsomest and most interesting in all England; and certainly it is the most delightful of the watering-places. For the most part it is built upon heights overlooking the sea: the houses in the best quarters are spacious and lofty, usually having bow-windows and verandahs, and reminding one of the external aspect of Park Lane. There is a fine continuous walk, about three miles long, near the sea: one portion is called the Marine Parade—the other the King's Road; and these constitute the fashionable

lounches for equestrians and pedestrians. Brighton is much frequented even in the winter season; as the climate is for the most part genial and pleasant; and without the excessive chill of winter, there is the bracing freshness of a saline atmosphere.

It was about mid-day when we sallied forth from the hotel; and as yet but few of the fashionable visitors at Brighton were to be seen: it was not until a later hour that they were accustomed to show themselves. We proceeded along the fine esplanade, which has a deep sea-wall overlooking the beach on one side, and a continuous line of handsome edifices on the other. Lord Egerton directed my attention to various objects of interest, and gave me many amusing particulars relative to his experiences of the place. But all the while we were thus conversing, my heart fluttered with feelings of painful suspense at the idea of an approaching interview with my sister. At length we reached the terrace where Captain Tollemache dwelt; and there Lord Chilstone and his son left the Countess and me to proceed by ourselves. With an increasing sensation of uneasiness and anxiety, did I accompany her ladyship to the door of the habitation that had been indicated to us. We knocked: the summons was promptly answered by a young page in an elegant livery; and the Countess asked whether Mrs. Tollemache was at home?

"No, ma'am," was the reply: for the youth evidently did not know who the Countess was. "The Captain and his lady have gone out for the day, and will not be home till the evening."

"What time do you think they are likely to return?" inquired the Countess.

"At about eight o'clock," was the response.

"Then, will you tell Mrs. Tollemache," rejoined the Countess, "that two ladies will call at about nine to speak to her upon some particular business?"

The page promised he would not forget to do so; and we retraced our steps to where the Earl and Lord Egerton were waiting for us at a little distance. I felt much disappointed at not being able to see Sarah at once—not merely because I was anxious to return to London—but likewise for fear that my sister, on learning from the page a description of one of those who had called, should decline to see me altogether. Still I determined to await the result of the evening's experiment, and at all events to postpone my departure till the morrow.

We went back to the hotel and partook of luncheon. At about three o'clock the Earl's carriage was in readiness; and the Countess insisted that I should accompany them for a drive. The equipage was handsome, but without unnecessary blazonry or conspicuous pretension: it was drawn by two fine horses: the coachman and footman wore liveries that were characterized by neatness and elegance, without the slightest display of flaunting tawdriness. We drove to the Marine Parade, and thence to the King's Road. The entire line of route was crowded with equipages, equestrians, and pedestrians. Parties of six or eight ladies might be seen riding together, accompanied by perhaps only one or two gentlemen, and followed by a single groom. I learnt from my companions that for the most part these horses were all hired, and that the grooms themselves were supplied from the livery-stables. There were however many wealthy and fashionable



persons, of both sexes, who had their own steeds: but still the preponderating number of the company evidently consisted of people who might be described as showing themselves off and cutting a dash. This affectation of display was in some instances of a most ludicrous description. For example's sake, I saw two females—no doubt calling themselves *ladies*, but evidently of the *parvenu* order—so enormously stout that they ought to have contented themselves with taking exercise on foot, or else appearing in a vehicle: but they were mounted on horseback—and in their riding-habits they seemed to be perfect mountains of flesh. They were cantering away as if they fancied themselves as light as feathers, and that their horses (hired ones) were perfectly content to carry such weights. It was a wonder to me that the unfortunate animals did not tumble down beneath their obese burdens. The two women themselves, each being on the shady side of forty, appeared to think that they

were the “observed of all observers.” And so they certainly were—but not with the sentiment of admiration they sought to excite: the general feeling with which they were regarded, could not have been otherwise than one of mingled risibility and disgust.

Presently, amidst the throng of equipages and riders, a vehicle resembling a stage-coach, and drawn by four horses, came careering along. It was driven by one of that description of persons denominated “gents.” He was an individual with a well-cultivated moustache and with immense pretensions alike of dress and manner. He was accompanied by half-a-dozen other young fellows of the same sort—all no doubt fancying that they looked uncommonly fine and were exciting an immense sensation. For this was a private equipage; and the whole turn-out was intended only for the purpose of display, and not of real practical use.

Anon, two gentlemen on horseback, followed by a

couple of mounted grooms, dashed past, raising their hats to my companions in the carriage. I immediately recognized in those persons the Hon. Captain Lavender and Mr. Bergamot. They bestrode most splendid animals; and their dependants were equally well mounted.

"I see by your looks, Mary," said the Countess, "that those gentlemen are no strangers to you."

I explained how I had seen them before, when I was in Lady Harlesdon's service.

"We met them at a large party the other night," continued the Countess; "and without being malicious, I may add—what indeed is a matter of notoriety at Brighton—that they have recently—I don't know how the process is termed—"

"They have been through the Insolvents' Court," said the Earl. "A couple of scamps! they are no sooner out of prison, than they are running into fresh debts and liabilities—proceeding as fast on the road to ruin as they are now galloping along on those steeds, which I dare be sworn are not paid for. One can't help meeting such persons in society, because society admits them: nor can one help acknowledging their acquaintance when meeting again. Perhaps they are no better than the Captain Tollemache of whom we have been speaking this morning. But the difference is just this—that Tollemache was found out some time ago, at another watering-place, cheating at cards; and so he has been cut as a blackleg. Now, those two young fellows who have just passed, are likewise addicted to gaming—but they haven't yet been found out: therefore until they are, they will continue to move in the best society. But I see that I have given you pain, Mary, by speaking so freely of the character of that man with whom your sister harbours—it was very indiscreet on my part—"

"I cannot help feeling deeply afflicted, my lord, at the bare idea that Sarah should be with such a character. What you have just told me is, however, an additional inducement, if any were needed, for the exercise of all my power to wean her away from such a disgraceful connexion."

The conversation was here interrupted by the temporary stoppage of the carriage amidst a throng of vehicles at the end of the King's Road; and the way was scarcely cleared again, when Captain Lavender and Mr. Bergamot rode up. They in the meantime had reached the end of the drive; and having turned round, now stopped to pay their respects to my noble companions—or rather, perhaps, to have the credit amongst the lookers-on of being known to the Chilstone family. The two Exquisites again raised their hats; and their eyes settling upon me at the same moment, I saw by the sort of half-start which they simultaneously gave, that they recognized me. For a moment their stare was most impudent; and Mr. Bergamot was on the point of sticking his quizzing-glass in his eye. But he suddenly desisted, when the Countess said in a somewhat pointed manner, "This is Miss Price—a young lady of our acquaintance—indeed, a very intimate and dear friend of ours."

The two Exquisites felt the reproof; and in evident astonishment at hearing me thus spoken of by this lady of high title, they took off their hats and made me a very courteous bow.

"Charming day, my lord, for the season of the year," said the Hon. Captain Lavender: "charm-

ing day! But I wonder you," he continued, now addressing himself to the Earl's son, "are not on horseback? The ride is perfectly delicious."

"When I ride on horseback," responded Lord Egerton, coldly and distantly, "I prefer galloping upon the Downs, or in the open country, to a mere show-off in the King's Road."

"Ah, well! every body to their taste, you know, my lord," observed Captain Lavender, caressing his moustache with a lemon-coloured kid glove. "But, by the bye, what do you think of my friend Bergamot's new purchase? isn't it a splendid animal?"—and he gazed admiringly at the steed which the younger Exquisite bestrode.

"It is a very nice horse in appearance," replied Lord Egerton: "but I do not profess to be a good judge in such matters."

"Yes—the horse is good enough, I dare say," observed the old Earl, rather impatiently: for he evidently did not much admire having the carriage thus detained by these insufferable coxcombs.

"It's a splendid creature—magnificent!" cried Mr. Bergamot, in the most affected tones of his cracked voice: and he patted the animal while he spoke. "As Lavender was telling your lordship, I bought him yesterday: it was a long price though—a very long price. What do you think, my lord, I gave for it?"

"Your bill, I should imagine," was the Earl's blunt reply.

"Good morning, my lord—good morning," said Mr. Bergamot, whose countenance became purple: and lifting his hat, he entered away, accompanied by his friend Lavender, both followed by the attendant grooms.

"I am glad I gave those fellows a cut," said the Earl, chuckling at his little exploit; "for the saucy manner in which they stared at Mary when they first came up to the carriage."

Passing away from the limited precincts to which the gay company habitually confined themselves, the carriage proceeded along the road towards Shoreham; and the drive was altogether extended until past five o'clock, when we returned to the hotel to prepare for dinner. The time passed away; and a little before nine a servant entered to announce that the carriage was again in readiness. The Countess and I entered it alone; and were driven to the terrace which we had visited in the morning. The coachman had received orders to stop within a few doors of the particular house which was our destination: and alighting, we proceeded thither. Again did my heart palpitate with violence; and I earnestly, devoutly hoped that my self-imposed mission might result in success. The page answered our summons at the front door; and we were immediately admitted into a handsomely furnished parlour on the ground-floor, with the intimation that Mrs. Tollemache would be with us immediately. Several minutes elapsed; and during this interval my heart continued to flutter like a bird in its cage. Presently the door opened; and a young female, most fashionably dressed, but with more splendour than taste, entered the room. She was about eighteen or nineteen years of age, and exceedingly beautiful. There was however a certain boldness in her look which, without any previous suspicion on the subject, would have forbidden the idea that she was a wife. She saluted

us rather with a patronising air of condescending courtesy, than with the easy politeness of a lady; and desiring us to be seated, she threw herself with a species of languor upon a sofa, observing in an affected manner, "I am so sorry we were not at home when you called this morning: but we have been to pass the day with some of the Captain's friends a few miles distant in the country; and they made so much of us, it was with the utmost difficulty we could get away at all! May I ask to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"—and then her large blue eyes wandered from the Countess to myself, and back again to her ladyship.

The moment the door had opened I was about to hasten forward and embrace the sister whom I expected to see, and whom I should have thus embraced with tenderness; for frail and erring as she was, I could not forget that she was still my sister. I was therefore exceedingly surprised—I may even say struck with amazement—on thus beholding a total stranger. A second thought however suggested that this was some female friend whom Sarah had deputed to represent her: but when she began talking in the above strain, I saw at once that she was now the so-called "Mrs. Tollemache." Then, what had become of Sarah? The Countess, who was unacquainted with my sister's person, was evidently at a loss to comprehend wherefore I had resumed my seat without exhibiting even the slightest sign of recognition in respect to this female; and she bent upon me a look of amazed inquiry.

"There is some mistake," I stammered out: "this is not my sister."

"Your sister?" ejaculated the young person, who, for distinction's sake, I must call *Mrs. Tollemache*; and it was with a kind of start that she spoke. "Ah! I begin to comprehend," she went on to observe, in a contemptuous and somewhat angry manner. "You are Mary Price, I suppose? I have heard of you. And you have come to see your sister Sarah: but you won't find her here. I am sure if I had known it was for this, I should not have given myself the trouble to leave the drawing-room:"—and she tossed her head with increasing insolence.

"And I am sure that on our part," observed the Countess of Chilstone in a tone of calm rebuke, "we should not have intruded into this house."

"Oh, if you want any information about Sarah Price," ejaculated *Mrs. Tollemache*, "it isn't I who will give it to you: but if you choose to stay a minute, I will tell the Captain you are here—and he can do as he thinks fit."

With these words she walked out of the room in a manner which she endeavoured to render as stately and dignified as possible,—leaving the door wide open. I glanced at the Countess as much as to inquire how we should act?—and her ladyship, comprehending the meaning of this look, said in a low whisper, "Inasmuch as we are here, Mary, we had better wait. You require information relative to your unhappy sister; and we must endeavour to obtain it from him who may alone be enabled to give it."

Meanwhile *Mrs. Tollemache* had flaunted upstairs. We heard a door open on a landing above; and then that person's voice exclaiming, in a tone which she evidently rendered loud enough for us to

catch what she said, "You are wanted down below. There's Mary Price, and some frumpish-looking woman along with her: and they have come to ask about Sarah."

I blushed up to the very hair of my head, with mingled shame and indignation to think that I should have been the means of exposing the kind-hearted Countess to an insult as flagrant as it was unfounded: for she was a perfect lady in appearance, and neither in age nor dress at all deserving of such a contemptuous epithet. Perceiving how much I felt, she took my hand kindly, saying with a good-humoured smile, "Do not annoy yourself, dear Mary, on my account. An insult from such a person is a proof that she is conscious of the falseness of her own position, and of the superiority of any one whom she may malign. Come, brush away those tears: Captain Tollemache is descending."

I wiped my eyes; and in a few moments Captain Tollemache entered the room. Closing the door behind him, he bowed stiffly to her ladyship, whom he evidently did not know by sight; and not condescending to take any notice of me at all, threw himself on the sofa which his mistress had so recently quitted.

"And pray," he said, addressing himself to her ladyship, while he superciliously twirled his moustache, "to whom am I addressing myself?"

"The frumpish-looking woman to whom you are speaking," was the calm and dignified response, "bears the name of Countess of Chilstone; and this young lady is my friend Miss Price."

The change which took place in the manner of Captain Tollemache was so prompt and remarkable, that the spectacle would have been pitiful and ludicrous to a degree, had I been in a mood to appreciate it in such a sense. He half rose from the sofa—made a very low bow—and proceeded to stammer out some words of apology.

"I beg your ladyship a thousand pardons—I would not for the world your ladyship should have experienced anything save the utmost courtesy—if your ladyship had only announced yourself, or sent in your card—But really I know not what to say—I am so shocked and annoyed—And this is Miss Price, your ladyship's friend? I had not the pleasure of recollecting her."

"You can therefore surmise, Captain Tollemache," resumed the Countess, cutting short those servile apologies, "the nature of the business that has brought us hither. Miss Price is a very dear young friend of mine: and I accompanied her to your residence in the full expectation that we should find her sister. Captain Tollemache, if you really wish to efface the sense of the insult which I have received beneath your roof, you will afford us with frankness and candour that information which we seek."

"By all means, my lady," responded the Captain. "But would you permit me to offer you some refreshment?"

"Nothing, I thank you, sir. Will you at once acquaint my young friend with those particulars which she is naturally most anxious to obtain?"

"I have not the slightest objection. Of course, from the mere fact of this visit, Miss Price," continued Tollemache, now addressing himself with the utmost civility to me, "you are aware that—that—in short, that your sister Sarah was with

me for a time—But I can assure you it was with her own accord that we parted. To go into farther particulars would perhaps be painful.”

“Nevertheless, Captain Tollemache, it is an ordeal,” observed the Countess of Chilstone, “through which my young friend must pass. You need disguise nothing in respect to her unfortunate sister. Mary, dear Mary,” she added in a hasty whisper, “sustain your fortitude!”—for I was weeping, and scarcely able to repress the audible sounds of those sobs that were convulsing my bosom.

“Well, the fact is,” resumed Captain Tollemache, “Sarah and I lived not happily together. I repeat, it is painful to talk on such subjects: but her temper was beyond endurance. From something I have heard, Miss Price is no stranger to the scenes that used to take place between her sister and Mr. Selden. It was a constant renewal of the same that I had to encounter. In short, one day—it must be about two months ago—Sarah left me—and—But really I think I had better say no more.”

My tears now fell faster—my sobs grew more convulsive: for I had no difficulty in penetrating the truth. Judging from the course which my unfortunate sister had adopted in leaving Mr. Selden to accept the protection of Captain Tollemache, it was painfully easy to comprehend that she had taken a similar step, and had made another advance in the sad career of depravity. And such too proved to be the fact: for after some hesitation, Captain Tollemache informed us that she had fled from him in company with a certain Mr. Octavius Lapwing, and that they had gone upon the Continent together.

Ah! that name was by no means unfamiliar to me: it recurred to me in a moment. Vividly came back to my mind that scene at Harlesdon Park, when the valets of some of the male guests assembled there, imitated their masters; and I recollected but too well how Mr. Lapwing's own servant displayed his master's character in the darkest colours, proving him to be a reckless spendthrift—an unprincipled swindler living upon his wits—saturated with debts—devising the most infamous means to raise money, as well as the most rascally excuses to put off his creditors—and what was perhaps even worse, conducting himself with a heartless and cold blooded cruelty towards a young female whom he had ruined, and whom he directed his valet to despatch on a vain errand to Paris, with the hope that she would be compelled to remain there for want of funds wherewith to return. Mr. Lapwing was the nephew of the old Dowager Lady Bagshot, on whom he was totally dependent; and bad as Captain Tollemache was, the character of this man appeared to me to be, if possible, infinitely worse. Yes—such was the villain to whom Sarah had attached herself: such was the unprincipled adventurer in whose society she had taken another and a deeper plunge in the vortex of guilt.

When Captain Tollemache had given the information so anxiously sought by me, but which was necessarily associated with such painful reflections, he said to the Countess, “I have heard so much of the Earl of Chilstone and your son Lord Egerton, that with your ladyship's permission I will do myself the honour of calling to-morrow. Of course the person up-stairs”—thus alluding to his mistress—“is out of the question. People of the world understand these little things; and as I am

a single man, it will be in this capacity I shall have the pleasure—”

“Captain Tollemache,” interrupted the Countess, in a cold and dignified manner, “I must beg you positively to understand that if I have this evening intruded over your threshold, it was merely for the purpose of accompanying my afflicted young friend in a search after an erring sister—and not with the view of forming any new acquaintance. I beg to add, sir, that when we meet in future, it will be the same as if we had never met.”

“Oh, just as you like!” ejaculated the Captain, whose manner changed all in an instant. “Of course I don't wish to force myself upon anybody; and on second thoughts, it can scarcely be expected that a gentleman like me will form the acquaintance of those who make friends with servant-girls.”

Thus speaking, he rose and stalked out of the room—not even ringing the bell for his page to afford us egress from the house. The extreme civility of his manner until this climax, was now to be accounted for: he had flattered himself that from the circumstance of the Countess calling at his residence, he would derive a suitable opportunity to form the acquaintance of her husband and son, and by their means obtain an introduction to that society from which he was now shut out.

As the Countess and I retraced our way in the carriage to the hotel, she enjoined me not to mention to the Earl and Lord Egerton the insulting conduct we had both experienced, as they would no doubt feel themselves called upon to resent it. For her part, she assured me that it made no unpleasant impression upon her; and even if for a moment she had felt annoyed, it was a species of vexation from which she was very soon able to recover, inasmuch as she could afford to look upon the individuals themselves with scorn and contempt. I expressed my sorrow that she should have experienced such treatment on my account: but she again silenced me in the kindest manner; and did her best to console me for the disagreeable intelligence I had received.

I had now no farther reason to remain at Brighthelm. Accordingly, on the following morning, I took leave of the kind friends whom I had found there; and attended by their best wishes for my happiness, as well as by their generous assurance of constant regard for my welfare, I set out on my return to London.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

THE LETTER WITH THE BLACK SEAL.

THE reader will recollect the two distinct resolves to which I had come at Ashford, when meditating upon all those circumstances that related to my parents, and on which the information I received from poor Thomas Dawson appeared to throw additional light. One of those resolves was to read the letter with the black seal: the other was to lose no time in the endeavour to clear up the mystery which seemed to hang around my father, who, I had so much reason to believe, was still a denizen of this world.

On arriving at the house, I experienced a true

sisterly welcome from my affectionate friend Laura Maitland: but I was pained by the conviction that her health had deteriorated considerably even during the four days I had been absent. She looked much paler and thinner—pale and thin though she previously was: she seemed more sickly and languid—sickly and languid though she had previously been. Perhaps it was because, not having seen her for those four days, I was more struck by her appearance now: whereas if I had remained at home, whatsoever change was taking place would have been imperceptibly gradual. Alas! the sorrowful thought was revived in my soul—a thought which had of late often occurred to me before—that poor Laura was not long for this world. I gave her a circumstantial account of all that had passed during my absence—not omitting to communicate the resolves to which I had come in respect to the letter and to my father. She approved of each separate determination: but when in the spirit of most affectionate confidence, I proposed to open that letter in her presence, that we might read it together, she said, “No, dear Mary: there is a sanctity about this proceeding which renders it necessary for you to conduct it in the solitude of your own chamber. To-morrow you shall show me that letter, if you think fit. But should you, after reading it, consider that it is your mother’s secret, which ought to be retained only in your own heart, rest assured that I shall not touch upon the subject.”

When I retired to my room, I sat down for a few minutes to deliberate once more, and finally, whether I should open the letter or not. There were many reasons with which the reader is acquainted, that impelled me to do so: and there was but one which prompted me to a contrary course. This was the fear of receiving such positive proof of a mother’s frailty as to destroy the feeling of love and tenderness with which I had ever been wont to cherish her image. But, no: I thought to myself that if I were compelled to sit in judgment upon her, the memory of all the kindness she had shown her children—the care and respectability with which she had striven to rear us—the zeal she had displayed in imparting to us such education as our respective capacities would at the time admit,—in short, the whole sum of her maternal behaviour towards us, would still reside in my memory to command my love; while, on the other hand, I could pity and compassionate her if she had been unhappy in the affections of her heart, and unfortunate in the alliance which she had formed. Therefore, all things considered, I resolved to open the letter.

As I rose from my seat and approached the bureau which contained my writing-desk, I could not help feeling that I was about to perform one of the most solemn acts of my life. It appeared to me as if that sanctity so deep and awe-inspiring which attends upon the circumstance of death itself, were now surrounding the proceeding I had in hand. I remember full well that I advanced solemnly and slowly towards the bureau; and that it was with abated breath I opened the writing-desk. When I took out the sealed packet and held it in my hand, I again hesitated. There was a kind of vague and superstitious apprehension in my mind that I might possibly be doing wrong. I sat down at the table,

and placed the packet before me. I read the memorandum traced upon the envelope by the hand of my deceased friend Mr Collins: everything connected with this letter appeared to associate itself with the dead! Again I deliberated: and I looked deep down into my heart to ascertain if there were the slightest sentiment of an unbecoming curiosity there. But there was not. Heaven knows with what sincerity did I thus scrutinize the feelings that were actuating me: every angel can attest the unselfish condition of my mind at that moment. And years too, had elapsed since I had first seen the letter with the black seal. Years had elapsed, during which I might have opened it had I chosen! It was in the summer of 1826 when my mother died: I was then a little past fifteen. It was now February 1833—and I was twenty-two. During all that interval I had never once felt the undue longing of curiosity impelling me to penetrate the secret of that letter’s contents. And now I was urged only by a sense of duty under altered circumstances: and wherefore, then was I to hesitate to read this letter at last, when the time for such perusal seemed to have come? wherefore should I tremble lest I was violating the spirit of Mr. Collins’ injunction? No: it must be done!

I accordingly broke the seal which that gentleman had affixed to the packet—I removed the envelope—and the letter with the black seal was once more revealed to my eyes. It was addressed to *Mrs. Price*, with the word *Private* marked in the corner. It had the deep black border indicative of mourning; and the writing itself was in a genteel masculine hand. I opened the letter: its contents ran as follow:—

“In the seclusion in which you live—cut off as it were from the great world around you—it is scarcely probable that the intelligence I have now to impart can have reached your ears; and were it not necessary for you to be made acquainted with it, I should not have risked a renewal of my correspondence with you—no, I should not, after the many urgent representations to the contrary which you addressed to me the last time we met! Lady Clavering is no more. She died ten days ago. The day before yesterday her remains were consigned to the family vault in the church of Sturry. It would be a miserable affectation on my part to declare that I am stricken with grief at the loss of a parent whose heartless cruelty to yourself—But no matter: I feel that I am already touching upon that ground which must be avoided!

“Is it possible that you will persist in leading an existence of comparative poverty, when if you say but one word, riches may be showered upon you? Surely there is madness in what I cannot term ought else than obstinacy on your part. No: pardon that word! You know that I entertain for you a feeling of too profound a nature to wound your heart wilfully or willingly. No, heaven forbid! By all the past, dear Marietta, and all its wild and tender recollections—by all its romantic and pathetic associations—by all the mystery of that link which binds my memory to your image—I am incapable of planting a dagger in your heart!

“I feel that my thoughts grow unsteady and my ideas become confused as I thus write! Oh! why were you ever born? why did I ever know you? Yet I will endeavour to calm my emotions: for I wish to impress seriously on your mind the necessity of considering—or rather of *re* considering, the course of life you purpose to pursue. Need I remind you wherefore I remain unmarried? Need I repeat what I have said before?—that all the property I can dispose of apart from the entailed estates, shall be for the children? Some day or

another, therefore—at my death,—and I do not think that my life is destined to be a long one,—there must be the fullest explanations between yourself and your husband. Yes: you will have to account for that sudden devolvement of wealth which at my decease will accrue to the children. Therefore, since the day of explanations *must* come, why not let it be at once? why not accept a happier and a higher position? O Marietta! you who know me so well—who have known me for so many long, long years—can comprehend the joy and delight it would afford me to accomplish that which I have so often proposed, but which you have hitherto so determinately refused! But once again I urge it all on your consideration. Tell your husband the entire truth: let him be made acquainted with all the past. Look upon the children, and consider that it is a duty you have to perform for their sake, however painful to your own feelings it may be—however full of anguish and regrets!

“I shall endeavour to have this letter conveyed to you as secretly as possible. But I shall remain in the neighbourhood the whole day. You must endeavour to meet me, Marietta, on the bank of the river, near the bridge. I will be there within the hour of sunset. Fail not, I conjure you!

“Your affectionate, but ever unhappy,

“WENDHAM CLAVEKING.”

Such were the contents of the letter with the black seal. What could I think now? what were the feelings with which I had perused this strange epistle? Could I wonder that it drove my father into a state of frenzy—that it made him fly from a home which he looked upon as tainted with dishonour? could I marvel that on the fatal evening he had fled to the place of appointment, feeling himself an outraged husband bound to wreak condign vengeance on the author of his tremendous woe? I shed no tears: but my eyeballs throbbed as if burning coals were in the sockets. There was a harrowing sensation in my brain—and yet an awful chill at the heart. The extremes of fire and ice were in my being then. Long did I sit at the table with the letter before me—but not reading it again; no, not daring to re-peruse another line of its contents! Hope in respect to my father—if by that name I dared call him—was nearly dead within me. Of what avail would it be to seek him out? Would he acknowledge me as his child? No: he would spurn me from him: he would reject my ministrations—my consolations. I should but remind him of his dishonour and woe; and instead of my presence proving a solace, it would be but too well calculated to revive all the bitterness of the past.

Such were my painful reflections ere I sought my couch; and it was long before I thought of doing so. I secured the letter again in my writing-desk; and it was by a species of mechanical instinct, rather than by the actual exercise of volition, that I disapparelled myself. All my sensations were those that would have been experienced if some sudden calamity had befallen me. The truth is, the contents of that letter were much worse than I could have possibly anticipated to find them. There had been a scintillation of hope, even until the very last, that some wrong construction might have been put by my unhappy father upon its contents: but this hope existed no longer. Everything in that letter appeared to proclaim the *one* astounding fact which had goaded him to frenzy.

But when I lay down in my bed, sleep did not visit my eyes. I remained thinking upon every subject which the contents of that letter could pos-

sibly conjure up, either directly or indirectly. Was I now constrained to regard my mother as the veriest of hypocrites and the most experienced of deceivers? If the reader will turn to the very commencement of this narrative, he will find the following passage:—“That our father experienced the most affectionate gratitude towards her for the exemplary manner in which she thus sought to train us, was natural enough; and with the happiest reminiscences of my early years are mingled those scenes of domestic bliss, when seated at the cottage-portico on the summer evening, or before the cheerful fire on the winter’s night, my father would take us upon his knees and bid us always love and be good unto the kind mother who kept us so neat and clean, and taught us so many good things. Yet do I likewise remember that sometimes a sort of damp was thrown over these scenes by the deepening of the pensiveness of my mother’s looks—or even by the actual trickling of tears down her cheeks; and then my father would beseech her to tell him whether she was unhappy—and if so, the reason why. But without giving him any direct answer, so far as I can remember, she would start from her seat, fling her arms about his neck, and exclaim, ‘Dearest Robert, you are the kindest and best of husbands! how can I be otherwise than happy?’”

When I now pondered again and again upon all this, what could I think of my mother’s conduct? Ah! the mournfulness, the pensiveness, and the tears were accounted for: but the galle with which she would have seemed to re-assure her husband, was there not something to shock me in *that*? My God! how devoutly, how sincerely—with what strong heart-yearnings, did I pray that night, as my head lay upon its sleepless pillow, that her guilt might be forgiven; and in order to mitigate as much as possible the impression which all these thoughts made upon me, I endeavoured more than ever to accumulate the reminiscences of all that had been good and kind, endearing and tender, in my deceased mother’s conduct alike towards her husband and her children.

When I awoke in the morning, after a short and troubled interval of slumber, I felt unrefreshed—wretched—miserable—unhappy. I almost wished that I had not read the letter with the black seal. I thought that Mr. Collins had indeed acted full wisely and well in wishing me to postpone as long as possible the moment when I was to open that letter. But it was done: it could not be recalled. Taking it once more from my desk, I proceeded to Laura’s chamber—placed it in her hands—and begged her to read it. She did so: and when she had concluded, she asked in a voice which showed how deeply she sympathized with me, “Now, Mary, what course do you purpose to adopt in respect to—?”

“Him whom I must still, if only for distinction’s sake,” I added, “call by the name of father? Last night, dear Laura, I reflected that it would be hopeless to imagine that he would receive consolation from me: but those thoughts were engendered under the first influence which this letter shed upon my soul. I think differently now. I am resolved to seek him out; and if he be really alive, and if I do succeed in discovering him, I will throw myself at his feet—I will beseech him to accept from me the tenderest proofs of filial regard, even though

he may not be able to look upon me as his own daughter!"

"Go, dear Mary," responded Laura: "it is the counsel I myself would have given you: it is a duty which you have to perform."

I returned to my own chamber—secured the letter once again in my writing-desk—and hastily dressing myself for going out, proceeded in the carriage as far as Oxford Street. There I left it to wait for me; and bent my way to the gipsies' house. I knocked at the door: but for some time no one answered. At length a very aged female—older even by some years, according to appearance, than the Norwood Gipsy herself, Barbauld Azetha's mother—made her appearance. I inquired for the Gipsy Queen. The hag was very deaf, and seemed half childish. She looked at me with some degree of apprehension as well as curiosity. I repeated the question, mentioning my name; and I at once saw by the change of her countenance, that it was not unknown to her. She no longer hesitated to answer me—but said that Barbauld Azetha had gone on a long, long journey, and would not be back for some time. I asked if I could see her mother. The hag's countenance immediately became gloomy; and shaking her head, she replied in a voice tremulous with old age, and likewise perhaps with emotion, "Barbauld Azetha's mother died ten days back."

"And whither has Barbauld Azetha herself gone? when did she set out? It is of the utmost consequence that I should see her."

"Barbauld Azetha left England the day before yesterday."

"Left England!" I exclaimed, smitten with the saddest disappointment. "But whither has she gone? Possibly I might hurry after her—or a letter would reach her——"

"She is gone to some far-off land. But whither no one knows. Ere taking her departure," continued the aged crone, "she informed the chiefs of her tribe that her absence might extend over many months. I shall remain here for the time being, till her return—unless death takes me away to some other home. If you leave a letter or message——"

"Yes: I will write—I will bring a letter to you the next time I am any way near the neighbourhood. But tell me, are you acquainted with a man bearing the name of Graham?"

"No," was the woman's answer: and there was nothing in her looks to warrant me in suspecting that she had not spoken the truth.

"Perhaps," I continued, "you may not know him by name: but you might recognize him by his description; for I feel convinced that he has been amongst your tribe:"—and I then proceeded to depict the personal appearance of my father with the utmost minuteness.

"I have never seen such a person," rejoined the woman, after listening to me with a patient attention.

"Then there is no help for it," I said, with a profound sigh, "but to await the return of Barbauld Azetha."

I thereupon turned away from the gipsies' house, and retraced my steps in deep despondency to the carriage. But while proceeding homeward, I reflected that although this old crone whom I had just quitted appeared to be ignorant of the person I

had described, others of the gipsy race in or near the metropolis might be better informed. I therefore resolved to institute farther inquiries. On the following day I proceeded to Norwood, and wandered about in the vicinage with the hope of falling in with some scion of the Zingaree race. Nor was I unsuccessful: for I at length encountered a middle-aged female wearing the gipsy's unmistakable garb, and whose swarthy complexion, bright back eyes, and dark lustreless hair, full well denoted her origin. Placing money in her hand, I asked her the requisite questions: but she knew nothing of the object of my inquiries. Weeks and months passed away; and whenever I was out walking and beheld a gipsy woman, I repeated those queries—still always in vain. I called three or four times at the house in St. Giles's: on each occasion I saw the old crone—but she had as yet heard nothing of Barbauld Azetha. In short, all my endeavours to obtain the trace that I sought of the individual who bore the name of Graham, were ineffectual.

It was in the middle of the summer of this year of which I am speaking, that Laura Maitland, after having one morning received a letter, told me with a smile that the day would not pass without something agreeable happening in respect to myself. She did not at first intend to explain her meaning, but purposed to keep the secret so as to afford an agreeable surprise. Perceiving however that I was much excited with suspense, she gave me the letter to read. It was from Mrs. Kingston—to the effect that herself and the Squire were coming to pass a week at the house; and that in pursuance of a consent already obtained from Laura, they intended to bring my brother William and my sister Jane along with them. I was delighted at this intelligence, and thanked Laura most fervidly for her kind consideration. The greater portion of the day was passed in preparations for the reception of the visitors; and in the evening the Squire's travelling-chariot stopped at the garden-gate. The meeting was a happy one; and I was delighted to perceive how much Jane had improved in appearance since last I saw her. She was now in her seventeenth year—had grown considerably—but had lost none of the artless innocence of her looks—and certainly none of the affectionate traits of her disposition. William, who was in his twenty-first year, was an exceedingly handsome young man—of genteel manners, and most agreeable speech. Frankness and candour were depicted upon his countenance. The Squire greeted me with that honest friendship which he was ever wont to display: while his handsome wife—looking indeed handsomer than ever—embraced me with the warmest effusion. Laura was delighted to see her relatives; and she gave my brother and sister the kindest reception.

I had no opportunity of speaking alone with William on the evening of his arrival—nor with Jane until she and I were together in my chamber, which I had arranged that she should share with me. But when we had retired we felt more inclined to talk than to seek the couch.

"Mr. and Mrs. Kingston," said Jane, "have settled certain plans in respect to William and me, which they will mention to you to-morrow. This much however I know—that William is to stay in

London to enter upon his medical studies, and I am going into some family—I do not rightly understand as yet in what capacity. Mr. Sands, you know, is about to retire from his profession: for he has made his fortune. He gave William and me some very handsome presents before we took leave of him this morning, and was quite sorry to part from us."

"My dear Jane," I answered, "we ought to be truly thankful for possessing so many kind friends. Whatever plans Mr. and Mrs. Kingston may have arranged, are certain to prove advantageous to yourselves, and therefore acceptable to me."

"Poor Miss Maitland," said Jane, "appears to be very, very ill. Did you not see how sorrowfully Mrs. Kingston from time to time gazed upon her, when she thought herself unobserved?"

"Yes, Jane—I noticed it: and, alas! there is no doubt that my poor friend is in a decline. She herself does not completely understand her true condition: or if she be aware of it, she mentions it not to me."

"And Sarah?" observed Jane, in a hesitating manner, and with a profound mournfulness of look.

"My dear sister," I responded, with tears in my eyes, "I know not what has become of her. Months have elapsed since I heard of her—"

"And what did you hear then?" asked Jane innocently. "But I am afraid that it was no good intelligence—or you would have communicated it to William. He has given me to understand that Sarah has fallen into wicked ways—and I have prayed on her behalf, Mary."

"It is a painful topic, dear Jane, and we must not dwell upon it. Heaven be thanked that you are all I could wish or expect:"—and I embraced her tenderly.

On the following day, soon after breakfast, Mrs. Kingston beckoned me to accompany her to a room where we could converse alone together; and she then said, "No doubt your sister Jane has told you, Mary, that the Squire and I have arranged certain plans, which I hope will meet with your approval. In the first place, with regard to William, Mr. Sands has experienced so much cause to be satisfied with his conduct from the first day he entered his house, that he has placed in the Squire's hands the sum of two hundred pounds to be laid out for his benefit. This amount is of course inadequate to the complete furtherance of the views which we entertain on William's behalf: but the Squire is resolutely determined to supply all the deficiency, notwithstanding whatsoever remonstrances," added Mrs. Kingston, with a good-humoured smile, "which you yourself, my dear Mary, may offer."

"It is indeed too much," I exclaimed: "it is taxing your friendship to an extreme! No, dear Mrs. Kingston! Out of the liberal income which I myself receive from your cousin—"

"There, Mary! I knew exactly what you would say—and I told the Squire what it would be. But he vows he will never speak to you again, unless you suffer him to have his own way. William is to be a surgeon—that is settled: and the Squire thinks that as there are so many bad ones in the country, we may just as well ensure to ourselves the credit and satisfaction of helping to make a good one. As for trenching on your own resources, Mary, it shall not be done. Why, my dear girl,

while you have remained totally unsuspicious of it all, a regular conspiracy has been going on; and now that it is quite settled, you are to know the results. You are of course aware that we have often corresponded with Mrs. Summerly and Mrs. Crawford during the interval since we were in London: but you have yet to learn what some of the most recent letters have been about. In short, your own good conduct, Mary, has raised you up a host of friends; and now you are reaping the advantages of your estimable behaviour. Do not think that your brother William is to be cast adrift amidst the dangers of this great metropolis—although I am confident he has both rectitude and strength of mind sufficient to enable him to avoid all its temptations. But he shall not be exposed to their influence at all. You know Mr. Appleton—an intimate friend of Mrs. Summerly? Well, it is at this gentleman's residence in the City that your brother William is to find a home while he pursues his medical studies. That is one phase of the mighty conspiracy which for some weeks past we have been concocting."

"My dear Mrs. Kingston," I said, with tears of gratitude in my eyes, "how shall I ever be enabled to thank you sufficiently, and all my other kind friends, for what you are doing? No—I cannot—words are wanting—"

And I stopped short, my utterance choked with the feelings that, coming up from the heart, appeared to swell in my very throat.

"My dear Mary, you have only to thank yourself for all this. Do you think that we should feel interested in you, if you by your own merits had not deserved our regard? And now, in respect to your sister Jane, who is a very nice girl—and, as you perceive, is growing up to be a very handsome one—I am sure you must be as proud of her as I know that you love her—and she is devotedly attached to you—Well, the ramifications of this conspiracy of ours have extended to her. I think that when you were at Brighton a few months back, you met some old acquaintances—"

"The Earl and Countess of Chilstone?" I exclaimed, already beginning to anticipate the nature of the intelligence I was next to receive.

"The same," rejoined Mrs. Kingston. "They have been down at Walmer for the last two months; and now they are going to settle themselves on the superb domain which they possess in Buckinghamshire. The Countess has taken a great fancy to your sister Jane, and means to have her to reside altogether with her. Her ladyship will treat her with a motherly affection, and has of her own accord volunteered all this. The Earl himself expressed his full concurrence; and so you perceive the whole thing is settled, waiting nothing but your assent."

"It would savour of the utmost ingratitude on my part, were I even to deliberate for a moment upon any plan which has been so kindly adopted. Mrs. Kingston," I added, in tremulous accents, "if you were a sister, or a very near and dear relative, you could not have behaved more generously—more nobly, towards myself and those who are dear to me."

"Rest assured, Mary," rejoined this excellent lady, "that it gives me unfeigned pleasure to be of service to yourself, or to those connected with you. William and Jane will stay here for a week—the



term of the sojourn which the Squire and I propose to make. At the expiration of that time, William will go to Mr. Appleton's — Jane to the Chil-stones'; and you will have no future care on their behalf. My poor girl, would that something could be done to relieve you from your distress of mind in respect to that other sister of your's. Do not weep: you have the satisfaction of knowing that you did your duty towards her—and that if she had continued to profit by your excellent example, she would now find friends ready and willing to minister to her welfare as we are doing for William and Jane. But to pass on to another mournful topic," proceeded Mrs. Kingston, "you know not how shocked I was to behold the alteration that has taken place in my poor cousin. In your letters I was prepared to find her much changed: but still, when I did meet her—when I saw what a wreck of her former self she has become—and yet a beautiful

wreck—it cut me to the very soul. Dear Mary, she speaks of your attentions to her in the most affectionate and grateful terms: you will continue to watch her to the end? I do not think that she is long for this world——"

Here Mrs. Kingston ceased: and the tears ran down her handsome countenance. I also was weeping; for the thought of losing Laura, whom I loved with the tenderness of a sister, was fraught with the keenest affliction.

Our interview now terminated; and soon afterwards I had an opportunity of conversing alone with my brother. He was of an age when I no longer considered it necessary to withhold from him any particulars wherein we were mutually interested. I therefore told him all that I had learnt from the lips of Mad Tommy; and I showed him the fatal letter with the black seal. We mingled our tears at the thoughts which it conjured up; but

neither of us gave utterance to a single word expressive of what we felt relative to that irresistible proof of our deceased mother's frailty. Passing on to another topic, I revealed to William everything which related to myself and Eustace Quentin; and while my affectionate brother proclaimed his fervid hope that the barriers to our union would be ultimately removed, and that he should see us happily allied in nuptial bonds, he emphatically approved of the whole tenour of my conduct from the very first moment I received the avowal of love from the lips of Eustace. In respect to Sarah, I had nothing new to tell William: for I had written to him at the time the fullest particulars of what I had heard from Captain Tollemache at Brighton. As a matter of course, we agreed to keep from Jane's knowledge all those painful circumstances which related to our deceased parents; and it was likewise my wish that my conditional engagement with Eustace Quentin should remain a secret from her.

The week passed happily and swiftly—too swiftly, as all such blissful periods in human existence do flit away; and at length the day of separation arrived. The Chilstones were in London; and I accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Kingston to call upon them, at the same time that Jane was handed over to their care. The Countess assured me that my sister should be treated with the love and tenderness that would be shown to a daughter; and under these happy auspices did I part from Jane. William proceeded to Mr. Appleton's—the Kingstons returned to Walmer—and the house relapsed into a degree of tranquillity which for the first few days appeared sombre and gloomy enough.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

TRAVELLING.

THREE months more passed away; and the cold October winds set in. One day, the physician who attended on Miss Maitland, sought an opportunity of speaking to me in private; and he asked me whether I thought she could be prevailed upon to pass the winter in a more genial climate? He suggested the South of France—or an Italian city, if she would proceed so far. I was deeply afflicted to hear him thus speak: for I comprehended but too well that he began to entertain the most serious apprehensions relative to my beloved friend. He said it was no use to conceal the actual truth from me: for that Miss Maitland's health was in such a state that ultimate recovery was impossible, but that her life might be prolonged if she would follow his counsel and avoid the cold climate of England during the winter months. I expressed my fear that she could scarcely be induced to leave her present home: for she had lately exhibited an increasing disinclination to quit the house at all; and it was with the utmost trouble—by dint indeed of earnest suasion—that I could get her to take an hour's exercise in the carriage, even on the finest day. Nevertheless, I advised the physician to lose no time in speaking to her upon the subject,—promising that if he failed, I would do my best to induce Miss Maitland to adopt his counsel.

He was a kind-hearted and benevolent man, with great suavity of speech, but without any hypocrisy

or affectation: he therefore acquitted himself of his somewhat unpleasant task with the utmost delicacy and circumspection. He succeeded better than I had anticipated; and Laura consented to follow his advice. We accordingly commenced our preparations for the journey. It was resolved to travel in her own carriage, but of course with post-horses; and to take with us a lady's-maid only, because when arriving on the Continent, we might engage a *courier* who would superintend all the travelling arrangements, settle the itinerary, and take charge of the expenditure. I now paid one more visit to the gipsies' house in St. Giles's—but was still disappointed in hearing that Barbauld Azetha continued absent, and that none of her tribe knew what had become of her. I arranged how to write from time to time to the old woman in charge of the place, so that should Barbauld return, she might know where to address me on the Continent. I went to Mr. Appleton's—passed the greater portion of a day there—and was delighted to find that the conduct of my brother William was of the most exemplary description. I likewise took leave of Mrs. Summerly, Sybilla, and Mr. Crawford; and another day was passed on a visit to the Chilstones, at Langham Hall—their country-seat in Buckinghamshire. Jane was completely happy in the bosom of that excellent family; and under the tutelage of masters provided for her by the Countess, she was perfecting herself in those accomplishments the initiative of which she had taken at Ashford when living with Mrs. Whitfield.

And now came my farewell interview with Eustace Quentin. I should here observe that during the interval which had elapsed since our first meeting on his return to England, I had seen him twice, and had received several letters from him. The ship which he freighted, had sailed some months back: but of course he had not as yet received any tidings as to the results of the venture. He was however in the highest spirits and hopes as to what the eventuality would be: but he was much afflicted on learning that I was about to leave England. At the same time he had too much generosity, as well as delicacy and good taste, to offer a word of remonstrance: for he was not only aware how great were the obligations that I owed to Laura Maitland, and how bounden I was to cling to her—but he experienced a deep sense of gratitude for the munificence which he himself had received at her hands. He induced me to promise that, as I was now so soon to be separated from him by a considerable interval alike of time and space, we might correspond oftener than since his return to England we had done. We parted: and it was a moment of deep affliction for us both.

On the other hand, Laura Maitland herself appeared to have some particular business to transact before she quitted England. She required a solicitor; and as her own—the one who had managed her affairs when she came of age and entered on the enjoyment of her fortune—had recently died, she sent for Mr. Wenlock, as being the most respectable in the neighbourhood. Besides, she entertained a good opinion of him on account of his readiness to do justice to Charles Hunter on finding that this individual had suffered so much wrong at the hands of Mr. Hobday. On the first occasion that Mr. Wenlock was summoned to the house, he

remained closetted with Laura Maitland for upwards of an hour: on the ensuing day he returned, bringing some papers with him; and there was a still longer interview. On the day after, he came back again, accompanied by his head clerk Mr. Hunter, and by a tradesman from the neighbourhood—most probably, as I thought, that they might serve as witnesses to some document which had been prepared for Miss Maitland's signature. But of course I did not seek to be present at these interviews, they being of a purely business-character: and Laura did not make the slightest allusion to them in my presence.

It was at the close of October when we set out upon our journey. Miss Maitland had decided upon retaining the house, and leaving the servants there, with the exception of the maid who was to accompany us. She shed tears on passing over the threshold of that dwelling; and, as she afterwards told me, she entertained a presentiment that she was destined to return thither no more. Alas! and I also at the time was stricken with the same ominous feeling on her account: nor could I restrain my own tears. We entered the carriage, which drove gently away: for the physician had enjoined that the pace at which we were to travel should be slow, the stages easy, and the halts frequent. We did not proceed farther than Sittingbourne on this first day: we slept there—and on the following one we reached Walmer, where we purposed to pass a couple of days with the Kingstons. I need hardly say how cordially we were welcomed at the Grange; but on the other hand how deeply the Squire and his wife were grieved at the necessity for their fair young relative to seek a foreign clime under such circumstances. All the domestics at the Grange were overjoyed to see me once more. At first they were afraid to demonstrate this good feeling on their part in too exuberant a manner, lest they should give me offence: but I soon convinced them that if my position was altered, I was not unduly elated on that account. Mr. Sands, who had retired from business, came up to dine in the evening; and I availed myself of this opportunity to thank him in words, as I had previously done in a letter, for his generous conduct towards my brother and sister. The following morning, after breakfast, I intimated to Mrs. Kingston my desire to go and call upon Mrs. Scudder: whereupon she rang the bell to give orders that the carriage should be got ready to take me into Deal. But I begged that so much ceremony might be dispensed with, as I did not like to stand the chance of being thought ostentatious and proud, and showing off as a fine lady in a neighbourhood where I had once been a domestic servant.

"Then," said Mrs. Kingston, with a smile upon her handsome countenance, "you shall at least go in the four-wheel chaise, if it be only to afford Luke an opportunity of telling you the most recent exploits of the old roan."

"I tell you what it is, Lizzy," exclaimed the Squire, who entered the room at the moment, "I have a very great mind to make Mary put on a habit and ride your bay horse into the town; and I will go with her. It would be a great satisfaction to me to see her mounted on horseback for once in her life. Besides, the girls"—meaning his daughters

—"have been tormenting me to make Mary ride out with them—"

"Hold your tongue, you silly fellow—do!" interrupted Mrs. Kingston, tapping her husband good humouredly on the cheek. "Why should you want Mary to break her neck with such harum-scarum nonsense?"

"Well, just as you like, old girl," responded the Squire, with one of his merry laughs. "I will go myself and tell Luke to put the old roan to; and I know the poor fellow will be as proud as possible to drive Mary into town. There never was such a favourite in a household as you are, Mary."

In due course I was seated next to Luke in the chaise; and after a little hesitation he did begin to tell me some new anecdotes about his favourite horse. I encouraged him to proceed, for I saw that it pleased him, and he was a thoroughly good-hearted man—so that he launched forth into such narratives of the wonderful sagacity of the renowned roan, that if he did not convince me it was the most extraordinary animal in the world, it was not his fault.

Mrs. Scudder still occupied the same little cottage where I had first known her, and in which I myself had dwelt. Her son continued to live with her: but he was absent at the time that I called. The good old woman was delighted to see me: she had of course heard from William and Jane, before they left Deal, of my altered circumstances; and she failed not to congratulate me most sincerely thereon. I saw that she herself was happy. Her son was perfectly steady in his conduct, and was thriving well: she had not once seen him the worse for liquor since the memorable transactions which had for a time threatened him with such serious consequences. But inasmuch as in this life there is no felicity without some little alloy, that of this worthy woman and her son was occasionally overclouded by the recollection of the flogging he had received, and which he regarded as a degradation that never could be effaced. Nevertheless, the impression thus left upon his mind was not strong enough to mar his sense of present prosperity, nor the appreciation of his bettered circumstances. I had brought Mrs. Scudder a few little presents with me from London; and having passed an hour with her, returned in the vehicle to the Grange.

On the following morning Laura and I bade our farewells to the Kingstons. It was evident that my poor friend was saddened by the presentiment that on her part these farewells were eternal: but both the Squire and his wife endeavoured by their language and their demeanour to cheer her as much as possible,—observing that a few months would soon slip away, and that she would return to England in the Spring with renovated health, when they would insist upon having us both on a longer visit at the Grange. She did not express in words the conviction which was deep in her mind, that she now beheld the Grange for the last time: but the mournful pathos of her looks proclaimed more eloquently than language could have done that such, alas! was her impression.

We took our departure. Fortunately the high road to Dover lay not near the village church of Walmer—or rather, the church itself was shut out from the view by intervening houses; and thus Miss Maitland was spared the added affliction of behold-

ing the spot where her love had received so cruel a blight and her happiness such a death-blow—I mean in reference to the exposure of the treacherous Frenchman who had so nearly succeeded in making her his victim. Dover is but eight or nine miles distant from Deal, and was therefore soon reached: but we found that on account of some circumstance the steam-packet had taken its departure at an earlier hour than usual: and therefore we were compelled to remain until the ensuing day. I did not altogether regret this: for I was anxious to see Mrs. Messiter. On several occasions since last her name was mentioned in this narrative, I had sent her pecuniary assistance—always of my own accord, and never as the result of any direct application from her. When last I had heard from her, she and her family were in the same unhappy plight as they had for some time been, her husband continuing in the ways of inveterate intemperance. Laura was accustomed to sleep a little in the middle of the day; and even the short journey from Deal had fatigued her sufficiently to encourage an inclination for slumber. I therefore left her in charge of the maid, while I set out to pay my visit to Mrs. Messiter.

As I proceeded along Snargate Street, I could not help thinking how different my circumstances were from what they had been at that time—six years back—when I was a poor, humble, ill-paid servant-girl, with but little cheering in my prospects. Almost every house that I passed was familiar to me: I even recognized spots where I remember to have paused in weariness through carrying the child which I had to nurse;—and now that I was well dressed, had the command of ample funds, and was treated in society as a lady, it all appeared like a dream. As I looked back and beheld Shakspeare's cliff towering above the southern part of the town, I shuddered at the recollection of that night of horror when I so miraculously escaped from the dreadful death to which the Bulldog and Sawbridge had destined me. I proceeded on my way, and soon reached the well-known house where the Messiters had lived. It was now a linen-draper's; the shop had been embellished as well as altered; and the costliest articles were displayed in the window. I looked on the other side of the way: but Mr. Smithson's establishment was shut up. A large printed placard was affixed to the shutters; and perceiving the ominous word "Bankrupt," I could not help crossing the street to read that bill. It announced that the whole of the household furniture and stock-in-trade of J. Smithson, a bankrupt, would be sold by public auction on a particular day.

"And this," I said to myself, "is the result of unlimited competition, which must sooner or later ruin everybody who practices it. It is the ruin of one's neighbour, as well as of oneself; and yet this is the system which is encouraged in a community boasting a consummate state of civilization."

I continued my way to the house in which the Messiters dwelt. It was a poor one—and the landlady informed me that the objects of my inquiry tenanted a single back room on the third floor. She looked at me very hard—slowly surveying me from head to foot, and with a certain expression of satisfaction gradually expanding over her countenance. I could not help thinking that the Messiters owed

her money; and that she, judging by my appearance, expected I should afford them some succour. It was with a sad sickening at the heart that I ascended the dirty staircase of a dwelling every feature of which bespoke the poverty of the occupants: for it was evidently a house let out in detail to several families of very humble means. On reaching the third landing, I knocked at the door of the back room; and a feeble voice, which I knew to be poor Mrs. Messiter's, bade me enter. I did enter: and though I was prepared for a mournful spectacle, yet that which met my view transcended in wretchedness the picture I had preconceived. There was scarcely an article of furniture in the place; and I am bound in truth to add that its poverty was not in any way compensated by cleanliness. Mrs. Messiter had never been remarkable for what may be termed tidiness: her habits were naturally of a slovenly character; and her's was a disposition too well calculated to have whatsoever energy it possessed weighed down by misfortune.

She was miserably altered. Always delicate-looking and pale-faced from the first moment I had known her, she was now sickly, careworn, and haggard—with sunken eyes, fleshless cheeks, and emaciated form. She had her five children dispersed about the room—the eldest being about fourteen, the youngest (which I had nursed as a baby) being nearly seven. They were miserably clad in ragged and scanty garments: all looked pale and sickly;—and though they were playing, yet it was in a languid manner, as if the natural spirits belonging to children of their age had long been crushed out of them. Such was the painful spectacle which met my view as I entered the room. Mrs. Messiter, instantaneously recognizing me, ejaculated my name; and springing forward, caught me by the hand. The elder children likewise knew me; and they all crowded around me. As the reader may suppose, it was a tale of woe and mournfulness that I heard from poor Mrs. Messiter's lips: and it was only uttered by degrees, in broken sentences—in a subdued voice likewise, so that the children might catch as little of it as possible. Her husband had become so inveterate in his drunken habits that if the kindness of friends who had known them in better times, supplied them with a few little articles of clothing or furniture, he would make away with them in order to procure drink. How the family had lived, Mrs. Messiter could scarcely tell. She herself did a little needlework when she could procure it: but her health had been gradually sinking, and she had neither energy nor strength to toil to the degree requisite to earn anything approaching a sufficiency. After some hesitation, and with tears streaming down her sunken cheeks, she whispered to me in a voice almost choked with sobs, that they had frequently been compelled to apply to the parish for relief. The eldest boy had obtained three or four situations at tradesmen's shops, to run on errands and so forth: but it appeared that he had lost them all one after the other, through the conduct of his father, who was accustomed to go on Saturday nights to receive the boy's wages; and being always in a state of intoxication, the nuisance became intolerable. Thus was it that Mr. Messiter, having brought his family to ruin, continued to prove a bitter curse to them in every way; and the unfortunate wife ended by expressing a terrible ap-

prehension that within a very short time they must all go to the workhouse.

I was much shocked at hearing all these sad details; and I sat reflecting upon what could be done to restore the unfortunate family to some degree of comfort.

"I don't know what Mr. Messiter has got in his head this morning," resumed the poor woman, after a pause; "but he addressed me very seriously before going out, telling me that all that had happened was no doubt for the best, for that it had chastened and purified him and would make him a better man. I can assure you, my dear Miss Price, I was for the moment astonished at hearing him speak in such a manner; and I even hoped that he really meant to reform. But, alas! how can I rationally cherish such an idea? I cannot for the life of me see how he can have been chastened or purified by a long continued course of dissipation and debauchery. However, he certainly spoke with great apparent seriousness; and I think he said something about having a call—and—what did he term himself, my dear?" she asked, addressing herself to the elder boy.

"A chosen vessel, mother," was the response.

"So he did," added poor Mrs. Messiter, in an ingenuous manner. "I don't exactly know what he means or what he has got in his head; and when he had gone out I began to fear that his reason was somewhat unsettled."

"I think," I observed after a little consideration, "that I can penetrate your husband's meaning;"—but I stopped short, for there appeared to be something so ludicrous as well as truly impious and blasphemous in the proceeding which I felt assured Mr. Messiter was about to adopt, that I really did not like to give any farther explanation.

"Do you really think he will reform, Miss Price? do you think there is any hope?" asked the poor woman eagerly. "Pray tell me! If I could only see that there was the least chance of amendment on his part, it would take an immense weight off my mind. But I perceive that you do not like to speak."

"I am fearful of wounding your feelings," was my answer: then observing that she wished me to continue, I said slowly and hesitatingly, "Yes—I can fathom your husband's intentions—he means to become a preacher."

Mrs. Messiter was stricken with amazement at this solution of a mystery which she herself had been unable to solve: but now she also comprehended the truth. Nor less did she appreciate the terrible mockery and revolting hypocrisy characterizing her husband's intention.

"Father is going to turn parson," whispered the eldest boy to his brothers and sisters: and then, in subdued tones, they all began asking him a number of questions—whether their papa would have a black gown—whether he would preach from a pulpit—and whether he would come home tipsy any more to scold and beat their poor mother? Ah! here was a new revelation for me. The vile man had beaten his unfortunate wife: but she, in the natural kindness of her disposition, had suppressed the circumstance. Her eyes met mine at the moment: and I saw by her anguished look and the tears that were trickling down her haggard cheeks again, that I had just heard nothing but the

truth. Bending forward to address her in such a whispering voice that the children could not overhear what I said, I asked her whether she had energy and strength sufficient to conduct a little shop if the means were supplied to set her up in business? She shook her head mournfully, and gave me to understand that it would be useless—indeed a mere waste of money; for her husband would sell off everything, or else make such inroads upon the proceeds that speedy ruin must be inevitable. Then I asked if she had no faith in his promises of reform? She reflected for some moments—and again her head was shaken sorrowfully.

"Then," I said, "you must permit me to offer you the contents of my purse: and perhaps you can manage to conceal from Mr. Messiter that you are possessed of such a sum?"

"My dear Miss Price—kind-hearted friend that you are," responded the poor woman, "much as I am distressed—deeply, deeply as I am afflicted—I cannot consent to rob you in this manner. Mr. M. would find out that I had money; and he would leave me no peace until he became possessed of it. It would all go to the public-house."

"Then I tell you what I will do," was my answer, after a little more reflection. "I will settle your rent here for the next six months: I will go and place some money in the hands of a butcher, a baker, and a grocer, with the understanding that they are to furnish you—and you alone—with a certain quantity of goods every week, and on no account to execute any order that Mr. Messiter may give them."

The poor woman was quite unable to express all the gratitude which she felt towards me: nor did I require any such demonstrations on her part. I gave her some little money for her immediate wants, and then took my leave of this distressed family. Before quitting the house I made certain arrangements with the landlady, paying her six months' rent for two rooms (hitherto the Messiters had occupied but one), and stipulating that she was to furnish them each in a comfortable manner. I told her that I should be in Dover again before the expiration of the term, and that if I found she had carried out the agreement faithfully, I would not merely renew the lease, but would likewise reward her for her attention. She solemnly promised to execute my bidding; and I then proceeded to make the arrangements with the tradesmen in the manner I had already explained. With the butcher I left thirteen pounds that he might supply meat at the rate of ten shillings a week for a period of half a year: with the baker a sum sufficient to cover an expenditure of five shillings a week; and a similar amount with the grocer. Altogether, these arrangements cost me a large outlay: but I was very far from grudging it—and when my task was completed, I experienced a degree of satisfaction that was more than a sufficient reward.

I was wending my way back to the hotel where I had left Miss Maitland, when I observed a crowd collected in a narrow street leading out of the main thoroughfare. I should not have taken any particular notice of it, had I not been immediately struck by a tall gaunt figure standing high up in the midst of the assemblage, which he was addressing in a tone of canting lugubriousness, at the same

time gesticulating with his long arms. Yes: I was not mistaken, either in my pre-conceived suspicion as to Mr. Messiter's intended pursuit, or in the figure that I now beheld in the midst of that crowd. For there was Mr. Messiter himself, standing on a tub placed upright, and preaching to the audience he had gathered around him. I could not help stopping short at the corner of the street to contemplate this spectacle: but I nevertheless remained sufficiently apart to avoid the chance of recognition. He looked taller and thinner than ever: his cheeks were sallow—but his nose was of a bright redness: his hair, now completely gray, was brushed straight upright from his forehead—for his hat was off. So far as I could judge at that distance, he was dressed in a suit of rusty threadbare black; and he had a white neck-cloth tied so tight that it was a wonder it did not choke him. The expression of his countenance was that of sanctimonious hypocrisy; and, as already stated, he was modulating his accents to a canting, whining dolefulness.

"Ah! my Christian friends," I heard him say, "what care are you taking for your immortal souls? Doubtless ye are surprised to behold me, hitherto a lost sheep from the holy flock, coming forward to help ye on to salvation. I have been a sinner—a miserable sinner: but the Lord hath had mercy upon me. He hath called me into his vineyard, that I may labour in his service. Christian friends! it is the repentant sinner who can best bring other sinners unto repentance. The unclean vessels may be rendered clean and savoury—if it be heaven's will: and behold, I am one! Ye are my congregation—ye are the sheep of whom I am called to be the shepherd. But there is a good and a wise saying 'that the labourer is worthy of his hire.' Ye, therefore, who hold fast unto that sublime doctrine, will put a few halfpence into the hat which is about to be handed round; so that the heart of thy pastor may rejoice, and that he may be strengthened in his labours of righteousness. Christian friends—beloved brethren! ye behold me raised up amongst ye here. I stand upon a pillar of faith, never again to fall——"

But scarcely were these words uttered, when Mr. Messiter disappeared in the midst of the crowd, which instantaneously sent forth a roar of laughter. Doubtless the head of the barrel which he had allegorically described as a pillar of faith, had given way like a drop beneath his feet; and thus ignominiously terminated his *debut* as a street-preacher. Although there was something indescribably ludicrous in the catastrophe, I could not catch the infection of the general mirth which it provoked: I was too much shocked and pained by that scandalous desecration of holy things, to indulge in a lighter feeling. I hurried on to the hotel without waiting to see how Mr. Messiter would extricate himself from his embarrassment, or with what success the hat would be passed round after such a display.

On the following morning Miss Maitland and I, together with the maid, embarked for France. We had a pleasant passage, and were landed safely in Calais. There we put up at *Dessin's Hotel*; and a *courier* was speedily engaged to accompany us on our travels. By easy stages we proceeded to Paris, where we took up our abode at a family hotel in the Place Vendôme: for we purposed to remain ten days in the French capital, not only for the purpose of

visiting all that was worth seeing, but likewise to afford Miss Maitland some leisure for repose ere we pursued our journey southward. I had heard and read much of the magnificence of the public buildings in Paris, as well as of the splendour of the fashionable quarters; and I found that nothing had been exaggerated. London impresses one with the grandeur of immensity—Paris with the outward glitter of civilization: the British metropolis seems to be an enormous hive of industry—the French capital a theatre of pleasure and enjoyment. The dingy-looking houses which are seen in even the best parts of London, contrast most strangely with the white edifices and cheerful dwellings of the gayer portions of Paris. Regent Street is no doubt a handsome one; but the Rue de Rivoli is magnificent. Some of the West End Squares have an appearance of solid and substantial grandeur: but in beauty of architecture they are incomparably inferior to the Place Vendôme. The Champs Elysées are more agreeable than the London parks; and there is no public resort in the British metropolis that can at all equal the Gardens of the Tuileries. The Boulevards have no parallel in London; and they appeared, when I was in Paris, to be thronged with the gayest, liveliest, and most pleasure-seeking people to be found on the face of the earth. Many of the shops are fitted up in the most sumptuous manner: but, as a whole, those in London have a more uniform air of substantiality. Altogether, there is something more solid and business-like in the London magazines of trade and emporiums of commerce, than in those of the French metropolis; and it would require but a superficial glance, and little knowledge of comparative statistics, to decide at once that the English capital was a far wealthier one than the sovereign city of France.

Miss Maitland exerted herself more than I wished to visit the public buildings: but I did not offer very urgent remonstrances to the contrary—because I noticed that her spirits appeared to revive, and that she lost somewhat of that languor which had hitherto hung upon her with its oppressive influence. We visited the splendid collection of pictures in the Louvre—the Bourse, or Exchange—the Bank of France—the Chambers of Peers and Deputies—the elegant church of the Madeleine—the Mint—the Garden of Plants, with its admirable collection of wild beasts and other zoological curiosities—the fine old gothic edifice of the Hotel de Ville, or Town-hall—the Palace of Justice, containing all the law-courts—and last, though not least, the Cathedral of Notre Dame. As we were proceeding one morning in the carriage to view this stupendous edifice, we passed by a building the ominous aspect of which at once struck us both, even before we knew what it was. It was a low structure, standing upon the edge of the quay, with its back close upon the river-wall: the door was open—and several persons, male and female, were going in and out. There was a certain solemn mournfulness in their looks, which perhaps, as much as the appearance of the building itself, struck us with that sinister impression. As the street was somewhat crowded with vehicles at the moment, the carriage came to a stand-still; and the *courier*, leaping down from the rumble behind, approached the window to inform us that the ominous-looking building was the Morgue, or Dead-house. I shuddered at finding myself in the

vicinage of that place whereof I had read in books; and I noticed that a similar tremor passed through the form of my companion. For the Morgue is the receptacle for all the corpses found in the river, or in any part of Paris, and which are not immediately claimed. Indeed, they are taken to the Morgue to be exposed to view in order to be so claimed by their relatives or friends; and whenever a person disappears at all mysteriously in the French capital, those who are interested in the individual immediately repair thither to inspect the ghastly array of dead bodies stretched upon the various tables, with their clothes suspended to nails above their heads.

We both experienced an infinite relief when the carriage moved away from the neighbourhood of the Morgue; and after having inspected Notre Dame, we desired the *courier* to take us back to the hotel by another route, so as to avoid beholding that ominous-looking place again.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

THE BANK.

FOR the better understanding of the incidents which I am now about to relate, I must inform the reader that the apartments which we occupied at the hotel, were all on the same flat, opening one from the other. On the opposite side of the passage there was a similar suite: in short, the greater portion of the hotel was divided and partitioned off in a similar manner, so that the occupants of each specific suite were almost as much isolated from other residents in the establishment as if they had a house entirely to themselves. They may be better described as distinct sets of chambers, with a common staircase.

On our return from Notre Dame, Miss Maitland, being considerably fatigued, at once ascended to the rooms; but I lingered a little behind to give some instructions to the *courier*. Laura was thus a couple of minutes in advance of me; and I was returning alone to our apartments, when the outer door of the opposite suite opened, and Captain Tollemache came forth, accompanied by the young female whom I had seen at Brighton. They both instantaneously recognized me; and it struck me that their first impulse was to speak: but I hurried onward without affording them an opportunity to do so. I however overheard the captain say to his companion, "Why, Helen, that must be Mary Price!"

"Well, what of it?" responded the young female, who for distinction's sake I had better still denominate Mrs. Tollemache; and I have no doubt, by the supercilious contempt expressed in her tone, that her words were accompanied by an equally disdainful toss of the head. They passed on; and I entered the apartments, where I communicated to Laura the recognition that had just been made. She approved of my presence of mind in turning away so abruptly as to prevent them having an opportunity of speaking; and the waiter almost immediately appearing to lay the table for luncheon, the conversation was dropped.

After the repast Miss Maitland requested me to

pay a visit to a banker, through whom her London one had made her the requisite remittances; and she gave me an authority to receive the sum of money which she needed. The establishment was at no great distance; and I did not therefore choose to have the carriage got ready merely for the purpose of taking me thither—but set out on foot. Passing out of the Place Vendôme, I soon emerged upon the Boulevards, and reached the street which was the place of my destination. The offices of the bank consisted of a suite of apartments on the first floor of a very large house. I ascended the staircase, and entered the paying-office, where the cashier attended to customers at a sort of opening resembling that where inquiries are made at a post-office, or where tickets are taken at a railway station. For the arrangements of the Paris banks are altogether different from those of the London ones; in the former all the clerks are out of sight, dispersed through the different offices—the cashier being alone visible, in the manner just described; and even at the largest banks there is seldom more than one of these cashiers. Indeed, the French do not appear to transact so much of their business by means of cheques and through the agency of bankers, as the English are accustomed to do. At the moment I entered the pay-office, I perceived a gentleman and lady standing at the aperture in the wooden screen behind which the cashier was posted. Their backs were turned to me at the instant; and therefore I did not immediately recognize them. I walked in, and took a seat until the cashier should be disengaged. A sort of ejaculation which struck my ear, caused me to look again in the direction of the paying-place; and then I perceived that the gentleman and lady were none other than Captain and Mrs. Tollemache. I instantaneously averted my looks again: but transient as the glance was that I had thrown upon them, it was sufficient to make me aware that they both seemed startled and annoyed at my presence.

"How will you take this money, sir?" inquired the cashier, speaking in very good English, and quite loud enough for me to overhear what he said: for the spot where I was seated was only four or five yards distant from the paying-place.

Captain Tollemache gave an answer to the effect that he would have so much in gold and so much in notes; but I did not precisely catch the amounts he named, as he thrust his head inside the aperture and spoke in a very low tone.

"I presume, then," observed the cashier, in a conversational manner, as he counted down the sums which had been specified, "that Lord Chilstone does not intend to pay a very speedy visit to Paris again?"

"Oh, no! certainly not!" replied Tollemache: and then he turned completely round and fixed his eyes upon me; for I was so startled at hearing the Earl's name thus mentioned, and under such circumstances, that I had involuntarily looked with astonishment in the direction of the pay-office. The Captain's regards were instantaneously withdrawn; and it certainly struck me at the time that he looked still more annoyed than when I had first entered the establishment. Nay, more—methought that there was a rapid interchange of looks between himself and his female companion: but on this point I could not be sure. Gathering up the money, the

Captain hurried the female away; and for the first few moments after their departure, I felt so agitated and so bewildered I hardly knew what I was about. The suspicion had flashed to my mind that there was something wrong: but how or in what way, I could form no conjecture. From that confusion of the ideas I was aroused by the voice of the cashier, informing me through the aperture that he was now ready to attend to me. Approaching the paying-place, I presented to him Miss Maitland's order, which he examined with the utmost attention. He asked me if I had my passport with me?—and I at once produced it. He appeared to be satisfied—opened a large book—and finding the entry for which he sought, requested to be informed in what manner I would take the money. While he was counting it out, I had a very great mind to ask him for what reason he had questioned Captain Tollemache relative to Lord Chilstone: but I thought that such a query would appear impertinently inquisitive, and might make me look excessively foolish. Yet during the few minutes I remained at the paying-place until the business was completed, I had it more than once at the tip of my tongue to put that question. Still I was afraid—and took my departure without doing so.

On descending into the street, I perceived Captain and Mrs. Tollemache loitering at the corner where it joined the Boulevards; and it immediately struck me that they were waiting for my coming forth from the bank. I was half inclined to turn in the contrary direction: but suddenly feeling that I had no right to put myself to an inconvenience in order to avoid them, I simply crossed over the way and made straight for the Boulevards. They hurried up to me; and the Captain, extending his hand, exclaimed in a tone which he evidently strove to render as urbane as possible, "What, Miss Price!—is it indeed you? We thought we recognized you just now at the hotel, and also at the bank: but we were not quite sure—and so we did not like to speak."

I did not accept the proffered hand; and bowing with distant coldness, was about to continue my way, when the Captain suddenly said, "Very well—just as you please! I was going to do you a service in respect to your sister."

At that announcement I stopped suddenly short: it was one that had an all-absorbing interest for me. The circumstance at the bank—the mention of the Earl of Chilstone's name—my suspicions of something wrong—everything, in short, fled from my mind in a moment, save the one topic which Captain Tollemache had just started. Indeed, he had touched a chord which vibrated to my very heart's core, concentrating there all the activity and interest of my thoughts.

"Why did you first regard us in such an unfriendly manner?" asked Mrs. Tollemache, assuming the most affable smile and putting on all her most winning ways. "I am fearful that you are offended in consequence of my behaviour to you and the Countess at Brighton some months ago? But really you must forgive me—you must make allowances for me, and remember that it was not a very pleasant topic for me to talk upon—I mean the circumstance that your sister had formerly lived with the Captain."

"And what about my sister? what can you tell

me of poor Sarah?" I immediately asked, with a feverish impatience.

"She is in Paris with Mr. Lapwing," answered Tollemache.

"Where? Give me her address, I beseech you!" I exclaimed, yearning intensely to behold my sister once again.

"That I cannot exactly do," answered Tollemache: "for I am not acquainted with it myself. But this I will do for you—I will ascertain the precise address in the course of the day; and in the evening I will take you to the house where your sister is residing."

"May I rely upon this?" I asked, somewhat vehemently; for I was fearful that the Captain would neglect to perform his promise: but it never occurred to me at the moment why he should make me any such promise at all.

"You may rely upon it," he answered. "The fact is, I met Lapwing a few days ago—there's no ill-will between him and me—and in the course of conversation he mentioned that your sister Sarah had more than once expressed a desire to communicate with you. Therefore I don't mind putting myself a little out of the way to do you both a service. If you will be in readiness at seven o'clock this evening, I will take you to where your sister dwells. Till then good bye."

He bowed very courteously—Mrs. Tollemache bestowed upon me another affable smile—and they passed up the Boulevards; while I retraced my way in the opposite direction, towards the Place Vendôme. I walked slowly, because I was absorbed in thought. Was it indeed true that within a few hours I should meet my sister—that I should have an opportunity of once more imploring and urging that erring girl to quit the path of crime and do her best to make atonement for by-gone faults? The longer I reflected, the more singular did it appear to me that Captain Tollemache should, to use his own words, "put himself out of the way" to bring me and my sister together. There seemed to be something strange in the suddenness with which that affable and conciliatory demeanour was adopted both by himself and his companion towards me. Was it to serve any ulterior purpose of their own? was it to direct my thoughts from what had occurred at the bank? For now that circumstance came vividly back to my memory; and my suspicion of something wrong returned with full force. Again and again did I ask myself how it was that the clerk should have addressed a question to Captain Tollemache relative to the Earl of Chilstone; and I repented of that bashfulness and timidity which had hindered me from seeking information on the subject. While engaged in such reflections as these, I reached the Place Vendôme; and on entering the hotel, ascended to the apartments. The moment I appeared in Laura's presence, she said, "I have just learnt, Mary, that your friends the Chilstones lodged at this hotel for some months when they were in Paris; and I understand that they occupied the suite of rooms opposite—those very ones which, as you told me just now, Captain Tollemache at present lives in."

"This is curious," I exclaimed: and then I recounted to Laura what I had overheard at the bank, and what had subsequently taken place with Captain and Mrs. Tollemache in the street.



"It was from our maid that I heard of the Chilstones having lived here," resumed Laura. "It appears that the waiter who speaks English so well, mentioned the circumstance to her, and spoke in the highest terms of the kindness and urbanity of the Earl and Countess, and of Lord Egerton. The clerk at the bank may therefore be aware that Captain Tollemache at present resides in the same rooms; and hence the mention of the Earl's name."

"It may be so," I answered, slowly and thoughtfully: "but how was it that the cashier should have spoken as if Captain Tollemache was intimately aware of the Earl of Chilstone's intentions not to visit Paris again very soon? and how could Captain Tollemache volunteer any specific assurance upon the subject? Setting aside my belief that both the Captain and his lady looked as if they would rather I had not been present in the bank at the time—and even supposing that their confusion was nothing

but mere fancy on my part—still it was strange that he should affect any peculiar acquaintance with the Earl's future intentions."

"It may be," suggested Laura, "that he wished to appear grand in the eyes of the cashier, and to boast of his aristocratic acquaintances. However, I think you would do well, Mary, to write by this day's post to the Countess, and explain exactly what took place; so that if there be anything wrong, the Earl may have timely information thereof."

At this moment a waiter entered, bearing a letter addressed to me: and he said, "The wind was so high in the Channel the day before yesterday, that the English mail-packet could not put across until some hours later than the usual time. The postman has just informed me that this is the reason the English letters are so late to-day."

Having given this explanation, the waiter withdrew. I should here observe that we had now been a week at the hotel, and that on the very first day

of our arrival I had written to my sister Jane at Langham Hall, to inform her that we had got thus far. The letter I now received was from her, in reply to mine; and it contained one from the Countess of Chilstone, an extract from which must be laid before the reader:—

"From your letter to dear Jane, we learn that you have accidentally put up at the very hotel where we stayed several months when in Paris; and this reminds us of a circumstance which we had well nigh forgotten, but which is now brought to our recollection. We occupied No. 6 suite of apartments; and in a cabinet opening from the innermost chamber, there is a small bureau where I was accustomed to deposit various little articles. We left Paris somewhat hurriedly, in consequence of business calling the Earl to England; and various little things were overlooked in that bureau, when packing up our trunks. There were some rather handsome furs—a shawl—divers articles of linen—and a packet of letters. It is only this packet of letters that we care about recovering: the other things may remain the perquisite of the chambermaid, and I have no doubt they are in her keeping. But we should like to have the letters back again; for though we do not exactly remember what they were, and have no reason to think they were of any great importance, still we should be unwilling for them to fall into strange hands. Will you, dear Mary, have the kindness to make inquiries upon this subject at the hotel? and if you succeed in recovering the letters, you need not trouble yourself to forward them to England. They will be quite safe in your keeping until you return."

I showed this letter to Miss Maitland, and at once saw that the same suspicion which had flashed to my mind now occurred to her.

"I think that we have a clue," said I, "to the reading of the mystery in respect to the affair of which we were just now conversing."

"I understand you, Mary," responded Laura. "You think that these letters of which the Countess speaks, have fallen into the hands of Captain Tollemache, and hence his assumed intimacy with the Chilstone family. He may have gained an insight into their affairs which enables him to speak of them with a sort of boastful familiarity. Such is the idea that has struck me."

"And such also was my immediate suspicion," I rejoined. "But let us hope that Captain Tollemache has made no worse use of the letters alluded to. I will at once ring and request the master or mistress of the hotel to inquire into the matter."

I did so: and in a few minutes the mistress of the establishment made her appearance. She was an elderly woman—very handsomely dressed, and of superior manners:—she likewise spoke English with the utmost fluency. I at once explained to her the purpose for which I had requested her attendance. She reflected a little while; and then said, "I remember, Miss, that after the Earl of Chilstone and his family quitted those rooms, they were put under repair and completely renovated; and the first occupants when they were in readiness again, were those who now tenant them—Captain Tollemache and his lady. The Captain has been here for the last three months; but I have never heard that anything at all was found in the bureau belonging to that cabinet. I have every faith in the honesty of the chambermaids—and indeed have received many proofs of it when things have been left behind by ladies or gentlemen honouring the house with their patronage. I will however go at once and make inquiries. Perhaps the things may still be there;

and if so, they shall immediately be given up to you."

The landlady quitted the room; and when she was gone, Laura said to me, "What course do you intend to adopt, Mary, in respect to this proposal of Captain Tollemache to take you to see your sister in the evening?"

"What can I do, my dear Laura?" I exclaimed "Surely you do not for a moment imagine that there can be any snare or treachery intended?"

"No—I cannot possibly see what treachery could be practised, or with what object. But I would have you exercise the fullest caution: for you have certainly no reason to think well of Captain Tollemache—that is to say, judging by his antecedents."

At this moment the landlady returned to the room. She said that she had spoken to Captain and Mrs. Tollemache upon the subject of the things left in the bureau, and that they had both promptly declared they had neither of them ever gone to that bureau at all, inasmuch as the other cupboards and conveniences in the chambers had more than sufficed for their accommodation. The landlady proceeded to observe that she herself had made a careful inspection of the bureau, and had found nothing there. She had questioned the chambermaids; and they one and all vowed that they had never opened that piece of furniture for a long, long period. Indeed, they had always supposed it to be locked—for the doors had remained closed, with the appearance of being fastened. The landlady added that it was possible the workmen employed in renovating the apartments might have self-appropriated the furs, the shawl, and the linen; in which case they had been sure to destroy the letters, inasmuch as they could not well have given them up and kept back the other things. But of course this was mere conjecture on the landlady's part; and perhaps I was not altogether of the same way of thinking—but rather inclined to the belief that Captain Tollemache *had* found and possessed himself of the letters. There was however nothing more to be said or done in the matter; and when I had thanked the landlady for the trouble she had taken, she withdrew. I then wrote a letter to Lady Chilstone, explaining precisely what had taken place at the bank, and the vain search which had just been made for the letters and other things left behind in the bureau.

After some farther discussion with Laura relative to the prudence and propriety of accompanying Captain Tollemache on the promised visit to Sarah, I finally resolved upon going with him. Accordingly, a few minutes before seven o'clock, I put on my bonnet and shawl; and taking a temporary leave of Laura, descended the staircase in the belief that Captain Tollemache would be waiting for me below. And such was the case. I found him walking to and fro in the court-yard of the hotel, smoking a cigar. Immediately upon seeing me, by the light of the lamps—for the evening was quite dark—he threw away his cigar; and accosting me, said, "I have a hackney-coach waiting outside: take my arm, and I will conduct you to it."

I did not however accept his proffered arm; but accompanying him out of the carriage-gateway of the hotel, was about to enter the hackney-coach, when I was struck by perceiving two men lounging

at a little distance, and who appeared to be watching what was going on. A presentiment of evil flashed to my mind; and yet I could not for the life of me conjecture how it was possible for Captain Tollemache to accomplish any treachery, or what motive he could even have for attempting it. Still I could not conquer the sudden apprehension that had seized upon me; and stopping short at the open door of the vehicle, I said, "Captain Tollemache, if you tell me my sister's address, there can be no need for you to accompany me. Indeed, for more reasons than one, it would be better that you should not."

"But I must," he quickly answered: "for Lapping is in difficulties—and you could not obtain access to his apartments by yourself—he is preciously on his guard. Go or not, just as you choose. I have no object to serve beyond doing yourself and sister a favour."

Feeling ashamed at any farther hesitation, as being a proof of unjustifiable cowardice, I at once entered the vehicle: the Captain followed,—and the coachman, closing the door, did not wait for any instructions—so that I concluded he had already received them. The coach moved away; and the glance which I threw forth from the window, showed me that the two strange-looking men were no longer in the spot where I had beheld them: indeed they were no longer to be seen at all; and so I thought to myself that they had really no connexion with the present proceeding, and that it was only my fear which had made me fancy they were watching what was going on. As the coach rolled onward, Captain Tollemache threw himself back in a corner, and spoke not a single word. He even drew the brim of his hat somewhat down over his countenance—or else it fell forward in that manner as he thus leant back: but I could not help thinking that it was to prevent the lights of the street-lamps and shops from streaming fully upon his countenance and betraying to me whatsoever evil expression might be thereon. Yet again did I ask myself what treachery he could intend? or, if intended, what could be its object? He could not force me to enter any house against my will; and I resolved that if the vehicle should draw up in front of a dwelling of suspicious appearance, I would not cross its threshold at all. I likewise determined that if I found the hackney-coach nearing the outskirts of Paris, and thus affording reason to believe that it was intended to pass into the open country, I would at once call out for the driver to stop; and if he should disobey the command, the *gendarmes* at the Barriers would soon compel him.

Such were the considerations and the resolutions which occupied my mind for about a quarter of an hour after the vehicle had left the hotel in the Place Vendôme. Two or three times I threw a furtive glance at Tollemache; and still I noticed that he was lying back, with his hat over his eyes. He evidently did not want to speak to me; and I, on my own part, had assuredly no desire to enter into discourse with him. I was just saying to myself that, after all, my apprehensions and misgivings were most probably excessively silly, and that the Captain had no treacherous intention whatsoever—but that within the hour that was passing I should really and truly see my sister Sarah—when on looking forth from the window, I beheld something that

at once revived all my apprehensions. Nay more—it smote me with the conviction that they were but too well founded. For as the hackney-coach passed along the street, its shadow was reflected in the well-lighted shops; and I distinctly perceived that two men were standing behind the vehicle.

"Captain Tollemache," I suddenly exclaimed, speaking in a firm tone and with decisive manner, "you are playing me false!"

"What the deuce do you mean?" he said, slowly looking up and putting back his hat. "Why should you accuse me in that manner, Miss Price?"

"Why should there be two men standing behind the coach?" I asked: "and these two men I have no doubt are the same whom I saw loitering near the gate of the hotel."

An oath burst in quick ejaculation from the lips of Captain Tollemache; and looking from the window, he appeared to watch for the shadow of the vehicle in the first shop-front where it should be reflected.

"It is all very well," said I, "for you to make this pretence of astonishment: but if you do not instantaneously command the driver to stop and let me alight, I shall give the order myself."

"By heaven, I don't understand it!" cried Tollemache: and his accents and his manner both alike struck me as being sincere and unfeigned in the mingled surprise and apprehension which they seemed to betray. "Where are we? Why, we are going all wrong!"—then thrusting his head out of the window, he called to the coachman to stop: but this individual paid not the slightest attention to the command; and Captain Tollemache repeated it more vehemently—thrusting his head farther out at the same time, and glancing back towards the two men who were standing on the board at the back of the vehicle. One of these men said something in a curt peremptory tone, which I did not catch—and which, if I had caught, I might not have understood: for my knowledge of French was still but of a very imperfect description. But the effect of whatsoever had thus been said was strange and striking enough in respect to Captain Tollemache. He gave vent to what appeared to me a low moan of deep-felt anguish; and sinking back in his seat, he leant forward, his elbow resting upon his knee and his countenance upon his hand: and thus for upwards of a minute did he remain silent and motionless as a statue. The driver had not obeyed his order to stop—the vehicle was still continuing its course—and by the reflection of the shadow, I perceived that the two men were still behind. But in a very short time it entered upon a bridge, which I knew to be the Pont Neuf—situated in the vicinity of Notre Dame, the Morgue, the Mint, one of the principal Hospitals, the Palace of Justice, and the Prefecture of Police.

I could not possibly understand what was now going on. Was it all a mere semblance and pretext of alarm on Tollemache's part—an understood thing with the two men standing behind the vehicle—in order to dupe and deceive me? or was there really something wrong, which had filled him with a genuine and veritable apprehension? My uneasiness increased with my suspense: fears of finding myself compromised by the fact of being with this man of equivocal character, fluttered through my mind;—and unable to endure the in-

creasing torture of my apprehensions, I suddenly said, "Captain Tollemache, what am I to think? what am I to suppose?"

"By heaven, I know not—I am bewildered—I don't know what to think myself. But look you, Mary," he suddenly ejaculated, after a few moments' pause, yet speaking in a low whisper,—*"if you are questioned about anything connected with—And yet, no—you can't be—Still there is something you could do for me—the moment we alight—wherever it is—and I am afraid I know but too well—you can speed back and give Helen warning—"*

"Good heavens, Captain Tollemache, what do you apprehend?" I exclaimed, now terribly alarmed.

"Hush! do not speak too loud—those fellows may perhaps understand English—they might overhear us! Oh, my God! this is sad indeed!"—and then I perceived but too well that Captain Tollemache was shuddering and trembling with a perturbation but too real and too deeply felt.

"If we are to part soon," I said quickly, "tell me Mr. Lapwing's address—tell me where my sister lives—"

"Forgive me, Mary!" he rejoined—or rather interrupted me—with nervous trepidation: "but I was deceiving you: it was all a story on my part! Pray do not be angry with me in such a moment as this: but the instant that I alight, do you speed back to the hotel—Now, promise me that you will—you know not how much depends upon it—"

"Captain Tollemache, if consistently with prudence and propriety I can help that unfortunate young woman," I said, "depend upon it that I will do so. But what does all this mean? why were you deceiving me? what object had you to serve? and what calamity is it which now seems to have overtaken you?"

"Do not question me, Mary—I am pretty nearly mad. Ah, fool that I was to yield to that temptation! Eternal God, the galleys!—But, no—no—I may yet be saved—and by you, too! Mary, will you assist me? will you succour me? I am at your mercy—I will fall at your feet—"

"No, sir—it is needless to do that: and as for succouring you, I know not how to answer. But methinks I begin to comprehend the nature of the dilemma into which you have worked yourself. Is it in respect to—"

"Hush! not too loud—for heaven's sake, not too loud! I will tell you everything. It is relative to Lord Chilstone—"

"I thought so," I observed, shudderingly: for now was the conviction deep in my mind that I sat next to an unprincipled forger: but at the same instant a feeling of immense pity sprang up within me, as I thought of the unfortunate young woman whom he had left at the hotel—whom he had no doubt beguiled into acting as an accomplice in his iniquity—and who therefore stood the chance of sharing in the ruin and disgrace which were overtaking himself.

"You are acquainted with the Chilstones—you are intimate with them," continued Tollemache, speaking in the low but hurried tone of a painful excitement: "you can dissuade them from coming forward—and there will not be evidence—"

"And those letters," said I, "concerning which the landlady questioned you this afternoon—"

"They are all destroyed—every one of them! But I will tell you all, so that you may lose no time in writing to the Chilstones—putting them in possession of the facts—assuring them of my contrition—"

"Pardon me, Captain Tollemache," I interrupted him; "but I cannot undertake this task. Rather tell me, first of all, wherefore you contemplated any treachery towards myself. Is not my sister in Paris? do you not know where she is?"

"No, Mary—on my soul I know not what has become of her! The thought of this stratagem struck me as I came out of the bank—"

"What stratagem?" I demanded quickly: then with a shuddering recoil, as a thought struck me, I said, "Surely, surely, Captain Tollemache, you did not intend—But no, I can scarcely think it possible that, bad as you are, you could have contemplated—"

"Ah, I understand you!" he said, vehemently.

"No, Miss Price—I had not the slightest thought of menacing your life. I will tell you frankly and candidly what I did intend; and this explanation I give, in order to defend myself against the graver charge. My purpose was to make you a prisoner for two or three days—"

"Where?" I demanded quickly.

"At the house of some women who would have taken charge of you. I settled the whole scheme this afternoon—and I take heaven to witness, it was nothing worse than I now tell you—"

"But Miss Maitland?"

"Oh! I should have gone back and told her that your sister was dying, and that you were remaining with her—"

"She would not have believed you," I rejoined, scarcely able to conceal my aversion and disgust. "But what was your purpose in meditating such treachery?"

"Will you serve me if I deal frankly with you?"—and still he spoke with the quick nervousness of a ruined, spirit-crushed, and almost broken-hearted man. "But, yes—I am sure you will—"

"Do not rely upon it!" I interjected.

"Yes—but I do. Know, then, that my object was to get you out of the way for a few days while I drew the rest of the money from the bank—"

"I understand! But surely the coach will stop soon or they will suffer me to alight at once—"

"It is stopping now. Ah! it is as I thought. This is the Prefecture! Now, Mary Price,"—and he seized both my hands with convulsive violence,—*"do me those favours, I beseech and conjure you! Save my poor Helen, without delay—and write to the Chilstones, that they will spare me also!"*

I had no time to give any reply, even if I had made up my mind at the instant what answers I ought to give: for the vehicle having stopped, the door was opened—and the two men whom I had seen loitering near the hotel, and who were the same that had got up behind the coach, seemed anxious for us to alight. They addressed Tollemache in quick and impatient accents—no doubt bidding him hurry. He, on descending from the vehicle, endeavoured to obtain their attention, while he said something relative to myself; for he turned and pointed towards me: but they would not listen

to him—and one of the men hurried him through the wicket of the entrance-way of the Prefecture of Police—while the other motioned and commanded me also to alight. I knew enough French to be enabled to tell the man that I was not the wife of Captain Tollemache: but the assurance was of no avail—I was forced to descend from the coach—and the officer (for such he was) conducted me into the building. I was now very seriously alarmed,—not knowing to what extent I might be considered compromised through being in the company of an individual who was evidently arrested for forgery; and I bitterly repented having so easily yielded to his representations that he would take me to see my sister Sarah. What was I to do? The best thing would be to send up at once and inform the landlord of the hotel of my position; so that he might come down and interpret for me. Such was the idea which suggested itself as the officer led me through several obscure passages and dimly lighted turnings in the spacious building; and I was about to make the endeavour of explaining to him what I wanted to say, when he threw open a door—and then I was ushered into the presence of a gentleman who I felt convinced must be some high authority, if not the Prefect of Police himself. He was a middle-aged personage—with a severe but intelligent countenance—an exceedingly sharp look—and a strong contraction of the brows just where they met above the nose. He was dressed in black, and had a tri-coloured scarf tied round his waist.

It was a large room to which I was thus introduced, and where this personage was seated at an immense desk of massive mahogany. At a smaller desk close by, a much younger man, whom I judged to be a secretary, was placed. Captain Tollemache, in the custody of the officer who had led him in advance, was standing near the larger desk; and I was marshalled up, so to speak, close to his side. From that too close contact I endeavoured to separate myself: but an impatient gesture on the part of the personage with the tri-coloured scarf, made me remain where I was; and the officer who had brought me in, whispered something which I understood to be a command to the effect that I was to obey *Monsieur le Prefet*: so that I now knew that it was really the Prefect himself in whose presence I and the Captain stood.

It was evident enough that I had been taken for Captain Tollemache's wife or mistress; and so soon as I had gained my self-possession, I addressed a few words to the Prefect in English, having little doubt that he must understand the language. But he cut me short with an impatient gesture; and the officer standing near, likewise made a signal for me to hold my tongue.

"Captain Tollemache," I said, in a hurried whisper, "you can speak French well—it is your duty to explain that I am in no way connected with you."

"They will not let me speak," he answered in a similarly subdued voice. "I wanted to tell the officers enough to clear you—I was in hopes you would be suffered to depart—I did not think they would bring you here—"

At this moment a side-door opened; and an elderly gentleman, very handsomely dressed, entered the apartment. I immediately recognized him: he was that same police official who had visited Ashford in compliance with Mr. Appleton's request, at

the time of the exposure of the false Count de Montville. He advanced towards the spot where we were standing—looked very hard at both Captain Tollemache and myself—and then whispered a few words to the Prefect's secretary. Again he raised his eyes; and this time his looks were rivetted altogether upon myself. I saw that he recognized me—or else he had a floating idea in his mind that he had seen me somewhere before. Knowing that he spoke English well, and as he was to a certain extent an old acquaintance, I felt as if a friend had suddenly come forward in the moment of my need. Advancing a pace or two forward, I said to this individual, "Suffer me to appeal to you for your assistance in the embarrassment in which some mistake has placed me."

"Where have I seen you before?" demanded the chief of the secret police—which office that gentleman held.

I at once explained to him where we had met; and on his part the recognition now was as complete as mine had already been with respect to himself.

"I recollect," he said, "that you were spoken of in the highest terms by that gentleman and his unfortunate niece whom I saw in England. And you are not in any way connected with this individual?" he added, glancing at Tollemache.

"Ask him, Monsieur, to corroborate my assertion to the contrary."

"That will not exactly do," responded the official: "through good feeling he might affect to ignore you."

"Will you send up and make inquiries at the hotel? will you send for the landlord? will you take me with you while you yourself make inquiries as to the truth of my averments? or what will you do? But pray keep me no longer here in this false and ignominious position."

Meanwhile the Prefect of Police had been looking over some documents that lay on the desk before him; and he now appeared in readiness to investigate the matter to be brought under his cognizance in respect to Tollemache, who, pale and trembling, appeared to be deeply sensible of the serious as well as disgraceful position in which he stood. My old acquaintance, the chief of the secret police, now proceeded to whisper a few words aside to the Prefect, who forthwith gazed upon me in a keen and penetrating manner, but with a certain degree of interest. I was asked by the friendly official, who now acted as interpreter, how it was I had entered the same coach with Captain Tollemache? I at once explained that he had promised to take me to see a sister of mine whom I was anxious to meet; and that this statement on my part could be corroborated by Miss Maitland, a young English lady of wealth and position with whom I lived. I now suddenly recollected that I had my passport with me; and I produced it. The friendly official exchanged but a few more words with the Prefect, and then intimated to me that I was free to take my departure at once. With great kindness he offered to conduct me to a coach; but before he led me away from the apartment he whispered a few words to one of the officers who had accompanied the vehicle which had brought me and Tollemache thither; and this functionary hurriedly left the room. During the few moments which thus elapsed

after my release from custody had been pronounced, Captain Tollemache flung upon me looks of the most piteous and significant entreaty: but I bent down my eyes and made him no sign in return.

"Now, Miss Price," said the police official whose presence had so opportunely befriended me, "I am at your service to escort you hence."

"One word—only one word with this young lady," said Captain Tollemache, in a state of wild excitement. "It is of the utmost importance——"

"No, sir—not a word," interrupted my police companion sternly; and the Prefect at the same time commanded the Captain to remain tranquil. I now hurriedly accompanied the official from the apartment; and I did not again turn my looks in the direction of the miserable man whom I left in custody there. As my companion conducted me through the passages and windings of the Prefecture, he inquired courteously after Mr. Appleton and his niece; and he expressed his regret to hear that the poor lady had died broken-hearted some time ago. He was much surprised, too, when I informed him that Charles Leroux—*alias* the Prince de Chantilly—*alias* the Count de Montville—and heaven only knows how many more pseudonyms—had committed suicide in Guernsey. On reaching the gate of the Prefecture, I found that the hackney-coach which had brought me thither was no longer in waiting; and the official said, when I mentioned the circumstance, "Ah! doubtless the officer has taken it back to the Place Vendôme: but I will send and procure you another."

He then despatched the porter to the nearest coach-stand; and the moment the man had set off, I said to my companion, "Wherefore have you sent back again to the Place Vendôme? But I can conjecture! You purpose to arrest the unfortunate young woman whom Captain Tollemache has doubtless beguiled——"

"She accompanied him on his visit to the banker's," interrupted my companion; "and therefore she must be an accomplice."

I could not utter another word: for I felt assured that it must be as he had said. Nevertheless I experienced a profound pity for that unhappy young creature who thus appeared destined to be dragged by the man whom perhaps she loved, into the depths of degradation, ruin, and misery.

"This is rather a singular affair altogether," resumed the police official, as we stood together in the gateway of the Prefecture till the hackney-coach arrived. "It was not till about five o'clock this evening, that the cashier at the bank had the slightest suspicion of a forgery having been accomplished: but on happening to look again at the cheque which had been presented during the day, he was struck by something peculiar in the writing. He examined it in juxtaposition with numerous draughts which Lord Chilstone had drawn when in Paris; and though the counterfeit was ingenious, it was nevertheless palpable. Prompt information was brought to me here, at the Prefecture; and I sent up a couple of my officials to effect the arrest of the Captain and his wife. On reaching the hotel, they learnt that the Captain was about to go forth in a hackney-coach which was waiting at the door; and this circumstance furnished them an opportunity of conducting the procedure quietly and tranquilly—which we always like to do in such cases, especially

at hotels. So they gave an intimation to the coachman that on taking up his passengers, he was to drive straight to the Prefecture; and the man obeyed the command. But here is a coach for your accommodation, Miss Price; and I am very sorry indeed that you should have experienced any inconvenience."

I thanked the official for his kindness and attention; and the hackney-coach drove away. It crossed the Pont Neuf, and was proceeding along the quay on the northern bank of the river, when it all in a moment came to a full stop; and at the same time I was made aware, by the confused sounds of many voices and the trampling of numerous feet, that I was on the outskirts of a crowd. The manner in which I was similarly stopped at Maidstone, on the occasion of the execution of the Bulldog and Sawbridge, rushed to my mind; and from an analogous state of troubled feeling, I was now smitten with the presentiment that some new disaster or catastrophe was about to be brought to my knowledge. I looked out of the window and beheld another hackney-coach in the midst of the crowd: it had likewise stopped short—and one of the doors stood open. But the attention of the multitude did not appear to be directed to the vehicle: it was all turned towards the river; and the driver of the coach itself was standing up on his box, likewise gazing intently over the parapet of the quay down into the bed of the Seine. I should observe that the vehicle of which I am speaking had been proceeding in the very reverse direction from that which the coach that contained me had been taking.

The crowd was numerous: it was every instant being increased by individuals flocking to the spot; and, as above stated, the general attention was directed to the river. Those who were nearest to the parapet, leant over it and looked down into the depth, where the waters of the Seine gave forth a feeble glimmering, which with the lamps upon the quay, and the dim flickering of a few stars above, relieved the otherwise deep obscurity of the evening. Many persons in the crowd were talking rapidly—some no doubt explaining to others the cause of the assemblage: but not an intelligible word reached my ear—and I could only conjecture that there was some sad accident or else some self-inflicted calamity. For several minutes did the coach thus remain at a stand-still, the crowd continuing to increase, their voices becoming more and more confused and Babel-like, as a multiplication of queries elicited a proportionate number of answers: but to my ears it was all an incomprehensible jabbering, and I could obtain no insight into the cause of the crowd and its excitement. Whatever was going on below the river-wall—whatever search was being made—or, in short, whatever it were that thus riveted the regards of all who were near enough to look over, appeared to be protracted and prolonged, and to afford no definite or satisfactory solution. At length the hackney-coach in which I was seated, began to move on again—the crowd made way in obedience to the energetic vociferations of the driver—and as it turned into a street diverging from the quay, the assemblage was left behind. It was with very painful feelings that I was borne back to the hotel: I expected on my arrival there to hear a tale of wildest grief and most frenzied distress respecting the unfortunate

Helen, whose arrest I felt assured had in the mean time been effected. On alighting in the Place Vendôme, I endeavoured to ask the coachman what was the cause of the stoppage which we had experienced on the quay; and though I could not perfectly understand the answer he gave, yet I gleaned such broken intelligence as may be thus expressed:—"A young woman—English lady—to the Prefecture—leapt out—into the river."

The money which I was taking from my purse to pay the fare, dropped from my hand: for I was smitten with consternation. It appeared as if the little I could thus glean, and the disjointed manner in which the words themselves became intelligible to me, nevertheless fitted and settled themselves all in a moment into a completeness vividly delineating an awful tragedy. Methought I could read it all; and speeding into the hotel, I at once asked the porter, who spoke English with fluency, if anything had happened? He at once replied that Mrs. Tollemache had been arrested, and that in almost a frantic state was she borne by the police official to the hackney-coach which he had in readiness to convey her to the Prefecture. I sped up-stairs, sorely afflicted at what I had heard, and still more at what I conjectured to have taken place; and on reaching the apartments, I found Laura in a nervous state of excitement. She was lying on a sofa in the sitting-room; and by the disorder of her dress—the dishevelled state of her hair—the odour of vinegar which pervaded the apartment—as well as by the appearance of bottles of salts and volatile essence upon the table, I saw that she had been in a swoon. The maid was there; and the look which she threw upon me, confirmed my belief that something serious had happened. Laura snatched me to her bosom, embracing me as tenderly as if I were her sister—thanking heaven that I had come back—and declaring that during the whole two hours which my absence had lasted, she had been a prey to the most dreadful presentiments of evil.

"And in the midst of my apprehensions, dear Mary," she said, with an expression of anguished horror sweeping over her countenance, "burst forth such rending shrieks—such fearful screams—Oh! never, never shall I forget that penetrating voice of female agony!"

"I comprehend it but too well, dear Laura," I said: and having breathed a few words to soothe and tranquillize her mind, I gave her a description of all that had taken place. I expressed my apprehension that the crowd on the quay—or rather the circumstance which had gathered it—was not distinct from the chain of events which we ourselves were discoursing upon; but that it was the crowning act of a dread tragedy, so far as the unfortunate mistress of Captain Tollemache was concerned.

I persuaded Laura to retire to rest as soon as possible: for the excitement she had gone through had evidently shaken her much; and indeed I was almost inclined to send for medical advice—but she assured me she should be much better in the morning, and that the shock which her feelings had received would be tranquillized by a night's slumber much better than by medicine.

For myself, I slept little that night: the adventures through which I had passed, and those other

accidents which had come to my knowledge, threw my mind into a feverish state of excitement. I apprehended the worst in respect to the unfortunate Helen: and even when I began to doze off from time to time, I found myself awakening again with a sudden spasmodic start, or else with a cold shudder, while imagination vividly depicted the form of the poor young creature struggling in the feebly glimmering waters of the Seine. Methought that I beheld her countenance—really a most beautiful one—all convulsed and agonizing in the death struggle of drowning; and though one constantly reads without much emotion of these tragical occurrences in respect to strangers, yet they become invested with an awful interest, and are but too well calculated to excite the most horrid feelings, when they happen in connexion with persons whom we have seen or known. Thus, throughout that night my slumber was intermittent, troubled, and unrefreshing: and I awoke at an early hour with a heavy headache and a feverish sensation all over. When I had finished my toilet, I repaired to Laura's chamber, which was only separated by a small parlour, or *boudoir*, from my own; and I was pleased to find that she was much better. I then proceeded to the sitting-room where breakfast was laid; and when the waiter who specially attended upon our suite of apartments, made his appearance, I at once saw by his countenance that he had something to communicate. I said a few words to induce him to speak: and he then told me sufficient to confirm all the apprehensions I had entertained on the previous evening. It appeared that the police agent who arrested Helen, was taking her in a hackney-coach towards the Prefecture, when, after vainly beseeching and imploring that he would let her escape, she managed to turn the handle of the door unperceived by him: and abruptly dashing it open, she sprang out and precipitated herself over the parapet of the quay. The police-agent darted out after her. Beneath the place where she had thrown herself over, there was a shelving pathway, or ramp, leading down to that part of the bank which the river usually leaves dry except at very high tides. It was upon this ramp that the poor creature had fallen: but it appeared that she was not injured—nor was she in the slightest degree stunned: for down the pathway did she at once precipitate herself madly—and gaining the river's edge, plunged into the water, at the very instant that the hand of the police-agent who was close at her heels, was stretched out to hold her back. Boldly did he plunge in after her: but the current was strong—the tide was flowing rapidly at the time—the unfortunate creature was borne away—and it was with the utmost difficulty that the police-agent himself succeeded in regaining the shore. Several boats were put off—the drags were used—and it was doubtless these operations that so long detained the attention of the crowd in the midst of which my hackney-coach had been stopped at the time. And that other hackney-coach, with the door standing wide open, and the driver of which was mounted on his box to gaze down into the bed of the river,—that was the vehicle from which the unfortunate creature had burst forth in a frenzied state of mind to avoid the infamy of punishment by means of the desperate alternative of suicide.

The waiter who gave me these particulars, said

that he believed the body of the deceased young woman had not as yet been found; or at least it had not an hour back: for a police official, who had called at the hotel to put some queries relative to Captain Tollemache, had looked in at the Morgue when passing that way, and had seen no female corpse at all corresponding with the description of Helen.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THE MORGUE.

I WENT and broke gently to Laura the details I had just received: for as she could not help feeling a sad and mournful interest in the circumstances of the tragedy, I feared lest she might be thrown again into a condition of nervous excitement, if the intelligence were at all abruptly communicated, or by other lips than mine. Even as it was, she felt much shocked at this confirmation of the apprehensions we had entertained on the previous evening; and she even shed tears at the thought that a young Englishwoman, so recently our neighbour, and but a few hours back in the vigour of health and the bloom of youth, should have perished thus untimely—thus desperately. I was sitting by her bedside, and we were talking in sorrow and mournfulness upon the subject, when the maid entered with an intimation that the landlady wished to speak to me in the sitting apartment. Thither I accordingly repaired; and found the mistress of the hotel anxiously awaiting my presence.

"Oh, Miss Price!" she said; "there is an English gentleman come here to inquire after a young lady, whom by some means or another he has tracked to this hotel; and by the description he gives, she must be the unfortunate creature——"

"I know what you mean," I said. "But who is this gentleman? and have you told him——"

"No, Miss—I have not had the heart to tell him what has happened: and I have got him in my own private room, so that he should not learn it abruptly from any of the domestics. Poor gentleman! he seems so dreadfully distressed at even the idea of meeting the young lady, who, I think, must have been his daughter and seduced away from him. But what will he feel when he comes to learn that she is no more—and all the terrible circumstances attending her death? I really quite pitied him: and forgive me, Miss, for the liberty, but I thought if you would only be so kind as to break the intelligence yourself, as you are his country-woman—— For my part, I really know not how to set about it: and my husband has gone down to the Prefecture to tell all he knows about that bad man Captain Tollemache——"

"It is an unpleasant—a most unpleasant task which you seek to impose upon me," said I: but observing that she was indeed very much troubled, and even appeared so bewildered how to act as to have well nigh lost all fortitude and self-possession, I added, "Nevertheless, I will undertake it: for perhaps he is the poor creature's father—who knows?—and the intelligence must indeed be broken to him delicately and cautiously."

"May I conduct him up here?" asked the landlady: "will you, dear kind Miss, undertake to impart the sad tidings to the poor gentleman?"

"I will," was my response: and the mistress of the establishment, taking my hand, pressed it with grateful effusion. She then quitted the room; and in a few moments she returned, ushering in a gentleman dressed in black, whose age might be bordering upon sixty, and whose countenance—thin, haggard, and care-worn—at once struck me as being familiar. Yes—there could be no mistake: I knew him, although I had seen him but once before in my life—and then only for a few minutes, and under very painful circumstances. Nevertheless, from the mere fact of those circumstances being so firmly impressed upon my memory, did I recollect one of the actors who had figured in them, though the part he played had been so brief and transient.

The reader will not perhaps have forgotten that episode in my narrative which relates how, having escaped from the white cottage in Derbyshire, I became a houseless and foodless wanderer—and how I solicited succour at the dwelling of a certain Mr. Palmer, the clergyman of a little village to which my wearied vagrant steps led me on the occasion. It will also be remembered that in consequence of the misrepresentations made by Dr. Vincent, who was with Mr. Palmer at the time, I was ignominiously and heartlessly ejected from the house; and that if I had not subsequently fallen in with Mrs. Hilton, a resident in the same village, I should most probably have perished of starvation. It was this same Mr. Palmer, the clergyman of that village, whom the landlady now introduced to the apartment where I rose from my chair to receive him.

"This young lady," said the mistress of the establishment, who was a very benevolent and kind-hearted woman, "will speak to you, sir, upon the subject——"

"My daughter!" ejaculated Mr. Palmer, looking anxiously round towards the landlady: "where is she? where is my Helen? where my poor lost child!—Oh, take me to her!"

"I beseech you, sir, to speak to this young lady," interposed the mistress of the establishment, endeavouring to make good a retreat.

"No—this is not my daughter," cried Mr. Palmer wildly: and his anguish was terrible. "There is some mistake!"

"No, sir—there is no mistake. You will hear all presently:—and the landlady, hurrying from the room, closed the door.

"Pray be seated, sir," I said, hastening forward to address to the unhappy man such words of solace and comfort as I could think of: but these were also words of preparation for a terrible tale to which he had to give ear. "Be seated, sir. You are a minister of the gospel—and often from the pulpit, as well as in private, has it doubtless been your duty to preach the doctrines of Christian resignation, and to enjoin the summoning of that fortitude which is so often needful to enable us to bear the ills of this life."

"Tell me, young lady," said the unhappy man, "whether anything worse than I have anticipated has occurred to my poor daughter?—for there is something in your words as well as in your looks, which strikes me as being ominous of evil—Oh! do not keep me in suspense! Have I been misled? is not my daughter beneath this roof?"

"How have you tracked her hither?" I inquired, scarcely knowing what to say, and not reflecting at



the instant that the question was irrelevant, and merely the prolongation of the poor man's anguished uncertainty: but still I wished to ascertain if he had as yet received the slightest hint of anything wrong having occurred.

"Months ago—yes, it is nearly a year back," responded Mr. Palmer, "she fled from me in company with a villain—a Captain Tollemache—But I have traced them hither! Late last night did I arrive in Paris. No matter how I learnt that they are at this hotel: it is too long a tale to tell—and I am yearning to clasp that erring girl in my arms—God knows I will forgive her—Oh, yes, I will forgive her, if she will abandon her seducer and return with me to our humble and secluded home in Derbyshire."

"Mr. Palmer," I said: but starting quickly at hearing himself called by name, he looked at me very hard, and I stopped short: for again was I bewildered—and all that I was about to say, slipped

out of my mind, like the end of a dream when one awakes from a slumber.

"You know me? you know who I am?" he said, still gazing earnestly upon me, "You have addressed me as a minister of the gospel—you have addressed me likewise by name: and now that I examine your features, they are not unknown to me—I have some dim recollection of having seen you before—but methinks under different circumstances. Alas! my poor head has grown bewildered with the anguish I have suffered for this year past. But who are you? I am sure that it is in the light of a consoler you have been introduced to me."

"It is, sir: and no matter who I am—at least not for the present. At all events, if I have had any acquaintance with your poor daughter, it was not because there was the slightest similitude in our positions—You understand what I mean, Mr. Palmer? I would not for the world wound your feelings wilfully—"

"I am sure you would not—I am sure you would not!" he exclaimed. "But, good heavens! to what revelation is all this to lead? For I have the horrible conviction in my soul that you are preparing me for something!"—and the unfortunate man trembled from head to foot in the strong cold quiverings of an almost mortal agony. "Answer me, young lady—answer me, I conjure you!" he exclaimed, in wildly excited accents: "is not my daughter beneath this roof?"

"She is not, Mr. Palmer," I replied, scarcely able to keep back the tears that were brimming up to the very edges of my eyelids, ready to gush forth. "She is not here, sir—and I am afraid!"

"Afraid? What! that I shall not easily discover her? Oh, yes! Put me upon her track—tell me, whither the unfortunate Helen has gone—and I will again speed in pursuit."

I shuddered in my turn,—shuddered coldly and profoundly, too, as I thought that if the unhappy man did hasten in the track of his daughter, it would be to plunge into the depths of the river, and by a passage through that watery grave seek "the bourne from whence no traveller returns."

"Mr. Palmer," I said, the tears now flowing unchecked, "you must prepare yourself to hear something that will shock you——"

"Oh, I am prepared! Your words—your looks—your manner have been all along preparing me—most delicately on your part, but yet most cruelly in respect to what I feel. Tell me—tell me—is my poor child—But I cannot speak the word—Oh, I read it in your countenance!—Holy God, is she no more!"—and with a wild and mournful cry the unhappy man covered his face with his hands, sobbing and weeping bitterly.

I said nothing for a few minutes, knowing from past experience of my own, that when the first bitterness of grief has found a vent in tears, the mind regains a certain degree of calmness, fortifying it to encounter the details of a calamity which it has already half anticipated and foreseen. And so it was in this case. Mr. Palmer wiped away his tears—stifled the sobs in his throat—and gazing upon me with a look of dreary sadness, he asked in a low hollow tone, "When did this happen?"

"Last night," I said. "But you have got to hear more—and to prepare yourself for many things that will wound and shock you terribly. That Tollemache is a villain——"

"I know it—Alas, full well do I know it! But gracious heavens!" cried the poor father wildly, as a sudden thought appeared to flash to his mind, "he has not laid violent hands upon her—he has not murdered my poor child?"

"Not actually murdered her in the literal sense of the term," I responded; "but by making her the accomplice in his crimes, he led her on to destruction—*self-destruction*," I added gently, murmuringly, and hesitatingly.

"Poor girl, poor girl!"—and Mr. Palmer's tears and sobs broke out afresh. "Oh, this dire calamity! this horrible misfortune! She was my only child—the living image of her mother, who was lost to me many years back: and now I am alone in the world—yes, alone in the world. Yes: all alone in the world!"—and he repeated the words with the dismal look and in the dreary tone of blank despair.

There was a long pause, at the expiration of

which he looked at me steadfastly and earnestly, saying in a low deep voice, "I am nerved now to hear whatsoever you have to impart. Tell me all—tell me everything. I beseech you to do so. My affliction will not, I think, burst forth anew: the wound is in my heart—and it is bleeding inwardly."

I accordingly made Mr. Palmer acquainted with those details which were necessary to give him a complete insight into the causes which had led to his daughter's suicide; and he listened in profound silence. No tear now trickled down his cheeks—no sob came up from his throat; but there was a nervous twitching and quivering of the lips. His countenance was ghastly pale; and it seemed as if it had grown more haggard, more careworn, within the last quarter of an hour. Immense was my pity for the unfortunate man. Not for a single instant—Oh! no—not for an instant did I entertain the slightest ill-feeling, much less animosity against him on account of the treatment I had experienced at his hands some years back in Derbyshire. I was even unwilling that he should learn that I was the same person who, when homeless and friendless—sinking with fatigue and half-famished—had been expelled from his inhospitable door. No—I did not wish the circumstance to be recalled to his mind: not for worlds would I have planted a fresh dagger in a heart already too deeply wounded.

"Whoever you are, excellent young lady," he said, breaking silence after another long pause which succeeded the close of my mournful narrative in respect to his daughter and Tollemache, "you have performed the true Christian's part, by the delicate manner in which you have broken to me this sad, sad intelligence."

He stopped short—averted his countenance—and covered it with his kerchief. There was another long pause: he was plunged into a depth of woe upon which it would have been profanity to intrude, even by the well-meant words of solace. And—alas, poor man! what solace was there for him—a father bereaved of his only child—his daughter, so blooming and so beautiful—and lost, too, under circumstances so full of awful horror! For several minutes he remained motionless with his handkerchief to his face; and not a sound escaped him. His heart was indeed bleeding inwardly. At length he slowly revealed his countenance again; and rising from his seat, looked earnestly at me, saying, "I go forth to take measures for the recovery of my poor child's remains. I have heard that there is a receptacle——"

But at all the hideous thoughts and dreadful associations which the bare idea of the Morgue was only too well adapted to conjure up, his anguish burst forth again: and once more did he weep and sob like a child, with a rending and a convulsing agony. It was one of the most lamentable spectacles upon which I had ever gazed in all my life: for this was a grief that struck even the tongue of solace dumb, and which made the sympathising heart feel its utter poverty in any attempt at effectual consolation.

"Young lady," he said, again breaking silence, and gazing upon me more steadfastly than even he had yet done—"tell me who you are, that I may for ever cherish the name of one who has displayed so much kind commiseration. Yes—the longer I look at you, the more am I convinced that it is not

the first time we have met. But where have I seen you before?"—and he passed his hand slowly athwart his brow, as if to steady and collect the thoughts that were already assuming the form of reminiscences and guiding his mind to a right issue.

"No matter, my dear sir," I hastened to observe. "Do not think of me—think only of the task you have in hand. Would that I could be of real and effectual service to you! But I know not how."

"Ah, I remember!" he suddenly ejaculated, with a kind of spasmodic start. "Yes, I remember!"—then as his whole demeanour displayed the deepest humiliation, the profoundest sense of mortification, mingled with contrition and distress, he said, "Oh, how unworthy I am of all this kindness on your part! I know you—I know you are Miss Price—Can you forgive me for the past?"—and the tears once more trickled down his cheeks.

"I beseech and implore that you will not farther allude to it," said I: and the tears were standing on my own lashes.

"Oh! but I can not, even in the bitterness of my misery, put aside the thought of my harshness and cruelty towards you. When, some little time afterwards, Mrs. Hilton received a letter refuting the calumnies that had been spread against you—and when we read in the newspapers of your noble and magnanimous conduct in respect to the trial at Derby—I can assure you that my heart smote me for what I had done. But if my lips can ever more frame the word '*rejoice*,' I can truly and unfeignedly declare that, even in the depth of my own affliction, I rejoice now to find you circumstanced as you are! For that you are happy and prosperous, is evident—God grant that you may ever continue so, and that your present happiness and prosperity may be increased a hundredfold. I will not ask if you have forgiven me for that one incident on which I look back with shame and sorrow—even with anguish: because your whole conduct to me this morning has proved the generosity of your heart."

I could not speak—I was too profoundly affected: but I gave him my hand—and he pressed it warmly.

"Now," he said, "I shall go forth to perform the sad duty which I have to accomplish. Permit me to call once more, and acquaint you with the result of my proceedings."

I assured Mr. Palmer that I would give him such welcome as I was enabled to afford—or as he in his distressed state of mind could wish to experience at the hands of one who deeply sympathized with him: and he then took his departure. Scarcely was he gone, when Laura, who in the mean time had risen from her couch, made her appearance; and I communicated to her all that had taken place. While we were conversing on the subject, and mutually expressing our commiseration for the unhappy father, the chief of the secret police—my old acquaintance in the Count de Montville affair—was announced.

"I understand, Miss Price," he said, "from the landlady of this hotel, that you are acquainted with Lord Chilstone; and that you were yesterday making inquiries after some letters which that nobleman left behind him several months back in the apartments which the felon Tollemache has been occupying here. May I ask if you have taken any step to

communicate with Lord Chilstone upon the subject?"

"I yesterday wrote to the Countess of Chilstone," was my response; "and from something I said in my letter, there is reason to believe that we shall hear more in the course of a few days. But I would rather not be in any way mixed up in the proceedings now pending against Captain Tollemache. I have already been too much excited—too much harassed—by what has occurred——"

"Miss Price," interrupted the official, "nothing shall be done to annoy you unnecessarily. Will you pledge me your word that if you receive from Lady Chilstone any communication bearing upon this matter, you will make me acquainted with it? With that promise I shall rest contented. Otherwise, the purposes of justice will positively require that I should *subpœna* you as a witness to detail whatsoever you may know: for I am convinced you *must* know something—or else you would not have applied to the landlady yesterday relative to those letters."

"I faithfully promise you," was my answer, "that if I receive from the Countess of Chilstone any communication which ought to be made known, to further the ends of justice, you shall at once be placed in possession of it."

"That is sufficient," answered the official.

"And relative to the prisoner," said I: "is he aware that his crimes have driven his unfortunate accomplice to suicide?"

"He knows it," was the response; "and never was a man so completely spirit-crushed in this world. Whatsoever fortitude he may naturally have possessed, seems to have given way: he is indeed a sad and miserable example of the depth of degradation to which a man may be brought down by the weight of conscious turpitude."

"And the remains of the unfortunate girl?" said I, shuddering as I put the question.

"As I passed the Morgue just now," rejoined the police official, "I made inquiries, and the body had not been found. But it is certain to be discovered. Pardon me for making you acquainted with details so much calculated to shock and fill you with horror—but there are nets in the river above and below Paris, which, with the ebb and flow of the tide, invariably receive the bodies of the murdered or the self-destroyed engulfed in the Seine."

I now proceeded to inform the police official of the presence of Mr. Palmer in Paris,—adding that the unfortunate parent had gone forth about an hour back, to ascertain if the body of his deceased daughter had been found.

"I will return at once to the Morgue," said the chief of the secret police, "and see if Mr. Palmer be there. If so, rest assured that he shall receive whatsoever succour and assistance he may require under these lamentable circumstances."

The official then took his departure. Several hours passed away, Laura and I remaining in-doors: for we neither of us felt ourselves in spirits sufficient to go forth into the gay and bustling city: the tragedy had made a deep and mournful impression upon us both. In the afternoon the chief of the secret police called again; and this time it was to communicate the result of his visit to the Morgue.

"On arriving there," he said, "I beheld an Eng-

lishman convulsed with grief, as he was turning away from an inspection of the bodies displayed upon the several tables. I immediately conjectured that this was the gentlemen whom I sought; and a hurried glance over the ghastly array of the dead, at once showed me that there was no female there answering the description of his self-destroyed daughter. I accosted him—told him who I was—and proffered whatsoever assistance it might be in my power to give. My conjecture was right: the individual was Mr. Palmer. While we were yet speaking, a stretcher, covered over with a cloth, was brought by two men into the Morgue. I saw in his looks that he at once comprehended, by the sinister appearance of the apparatus, that a dead body lay stretched there beneath that covering—and that he was likewise smitten with a presentiment that he was about to gaze on his hapless daughter. I did my best to comfort and strengthen his mind—or at least to prepare him for whatsoever might ensue. The cloth was removed; and never shall I forget the scene which followed. Miss Price, I have been many years connected with the police of Paris—I have beheld enough to harden the heart of any one—I have been familiarized with spectacles of mental anguish in all its most harrowing forms. The death-bed—the Morgue—the condemned cell—the scaffold of the guillotine, have all contributed their peculiar associations thus to initiate me in every varied phase of feeling through which the human soul can possibly pass. I am not therefore very easily moved: I am accustomed to look upon such scenes as those; and familiarity with them blunts the edge of sympathy, and produces indifference—often callousness. Perhaps you will respect me the less for making such an avowal: but it is nevertheless the truth. It is the inevitable hardening of the heart to which my avocations and experiences tend. I repeat therefore that I am not easily moved: but never, never shall I forget the scene which I was forced to contemplate ere now! That unhappy father gave vent to a cry so wild and mournful, the moment his looks caught the first glimpse of the countenance which was revealed when the cloth was removed from the dead, that it thrilled through my brain: it seems to be ringing there now. Then he flung himself upon the corpse, all dripping with water as it was: he embraced it—he flung his arms around it—he talked to it as if it were alive—it seemed as if he could not convince himself that his poor child was no more. But I will not distress you with farther details. Suffice it to say that I had the body removed to a neighbouring tavern—I myself conducted Mr. Palmer thither—I sent for an undertaker to make the requisite arrangements for the funeral—and I desired the people of the house to show the distressed gentleman every possible attention.”

Both Laura and myself had wept and sobbed at the affecting recital; and after the police official had again taken his departure, it was some time before we could in any way compose our feelings or regain a measure of tranquillity. Mr. Palmer did not make his appearance again that day—nor yet the next: but the day after he called in the evening. The funeral was over: for I should observe that in France interments are precipitated, and take place generally within forty-eight or sixty-four hours

after death. He had followed his daughter to a grave which had been hollowed for her reception in the picturesque cemetery of Pere la Chaise; and no doubt that profuse and bitter were the tears he had shed over the earth that was heaped upon her coffin. His affliction did not now burst forth in paroxysms or in ebullitions: it was outwardly subdued, but all the more profoundly experienced within. He came to bid me farewell: for he could not endure to remain any longer in a city where he had passed through so many phases of bitter woe: he was anxious to get back to the retirement of his own village-dwelling—there to yield himself up to such reflections as the tragic end of his daughter would inevitably force upon him. He again expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the sympathy I had shown him; and I am convinced that the remembrance of his former harshness towards me, materially tended to enhance the poignancy of his thoughts. But alike by my words and manner did I strive to the utmost of my power to soften the keenness of that reflection: and he went away invoking blessings on my head.

Three days afterwards I received a letter from the Countess of Chilstone, the contents of which I felt myself bound, in accordance with the promise I had made, to communicate to the chief of the secret police. It appeared that the account I had given of Captain Tollemache's proceedings at the bank, had brought to the recollection of the Earl a circumstance which he had hitherto quite forgotten: indeed he had altogether lost sight of it;—and this was that he had left a sum of money, amounting to about twelve hundred pounds, in that particular bank. The Countess now assured me—as indeed I had already full well known—that so far from ever having empowered Captain Tollemache to draw upon those funds, the Earl entertained a thorough aversion for him, in consequence of all that he knew prejudicial to his character. They had however heard nothing more of him since the time I was at Brighton. The Earl enclosed me a proper authority to receive any monies which might be still remaining in the bank, should Captain Tollemache not have drawn the whole out: but if he had, the Earl had made up his mind to endure the loss quietly, rather than undergo the trouble and additional expense of coming over to Paris to institute a prosecution. The Countess added, that if, as there appeared to be too much reason to suspect, Captain Tollemache had really been making free with those funds, it must be regarded as a positive proof that the packet of letters had fallen into his hands, and that he had thence gleaned the knowledge that there were such monies at that particular bank; and he must likewise have found some document bearing the Earl's signature, which had afforded him a copy for forging his lordship's name. These were the business-details of her ladyship's letter: in respect to private matters, she informed me that my sister Jane was in excellent health—progressing well with her studies in French, Italian, music, and drawing—and that her amiable disposition endeared her to all who knew her.

I sent for the chief of the secret police, and placed this letter in his hand. He thanked me for the fidelity with which I had kept my promise, and went away. It now appeared that Laura and I had nothing farther to detain us in Paris; and we

accordingly decided upon renewing our travels on the following morning. I however went to the bank, and there learnt that Captain Tollemache had only drawn five hundred pounds of the money—that there were consequently seven hundred still left in hand, and which amount was immediately placed at my disposal. But the cashier informed me that the banker held himself responsible for the entire amount of twelve hundred pounds (twenty-seven thousand five hundred francs), as it was not the Earl of Chilstone's fault that the forgery had been committed. I did not know precisely how to act in the matter, inasmuch as it seemed from her ladyship's letter that her husband's impression was that he would have to bear the loss. I accordingly requested that the banker himself would communicate direct with the Earl of Chilstone: and this arrangement was of course assented to.

In the evening the chief of the secret police paid me a final visit,—his object being to communicate the particulars and result of the examination to which Captain Tollemache had that day been subjected before the Judge of Instruction, who had now cognizance of the matter. It appeared that the prisoner was completely crushed and spirit-broken; and that instead of hardihood and effrontery, he displayed the meanness and most pusillanimous terror at the penalties he had incurred. In this frame of mind he had made a full confession. He had found the various articles which the Chilstones had left in the bureau: and in order to prevent the chance of their being seen and recognized by any one belonging to the hotel, he and his unfortunate accomplice, Helen Palmer, had at once destroyed everything thus found, with the exception of the letters. These they carefully perused. Amongst them were documents indicating the deposit of the money at the bank; and there was a note from the banker, evidently in reply to one from the Earl, to the effect that as his lordship was about to leave hurriedly for England and did not choose to take those funds with him, they should be held during his pleasure, and interest would be allowed upon them. The Captain thereupon conceived it to be possible that the money might still be at the bank; and proceeding thither, he said in an off-hand way, "that he had been requested to call there by his very particular and intimate friend Lord Chilstone, who was in England." The cashier, being thus thrown off his guard—and indeed completely deceived by the affable manners and aristocratic appearance of Captain Tollemache—said he supposed that the object of the Captain's visit was with regard to the money which Lord Chilstone had left at that bank. The Captain replied that such was the fact,—adding that he would call again in a few days. Having thus cleverly ascertained that the money was there, Captain Tollemache set himself to work to study an imitation of the Earl of Chilstone's signature, for which he found a copy amongst the documents discovered in the bureau. He did not however consider it prudent to draw a cheque for the whole sum at once: besides, there was interest to be computed, and he was not therefore aware of the exact amount. He accordingly tried the experiment with a draft for five hundred pounds (twelve thousand five hundred francs;) and the cashier, totally unsuspecting, paid it at once. This was on the occasion when I happened to be

present at the bank likewise. On issuing forth with his female accomplice, the Captain at once communicated to her a design which had struck him, not merely for their own immediate safety, but likewise to afford them leisure for self-appropriating the remainder of the money. This project was to dispose of me as a prisoner for a few days; and the reader has seen how it would have been carried out, if the cashier had not so promptly detected the forgery and caused the Captain's arrest. It should be added that when the packet of letters had been carefully studied, they were all burnt; and it may likewise be observed that Captain Tollemache had long been a man of utterly ruined fortunes—that he had lived upon his wits—and that the money which he was supposed to have inherited from a deceased relative at the time he seduced away my sister from Mr. Selden, was in reality obtained by some vilely dishonest means.

Such had been the sum and substance of the wretched man's confession to the Judge of Instruction. He had accordingly been duly committed for trial; and as the result of a farther statement which he made, the greater portion of the money which he had obtained by the forgery, was discovered at another bank, into which he had paid it under a fictitious name, with a view to its being remitted to England—whither there can be no doubt he had intended to proceed so soon as he should have accomplished his plans and obtained possession of the rest of the booty. Thus it fortunately occurred, after all, that the banker sustained but a very trifling loss from the fraud which had been perpetrated,—the Captain having spent but some fifty or sixty pounds in paying a few pressing debts, during the interval between the receipt of the amount at the banker's and his arrest in the evening of the same day.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

MILAN.

ACCORDING to the arrangements already resolved upon, we resumed our journey on the following day, with the intention of proceeding by slow stages into Italy. I pass over all details of this travel: suffice it to say that at the expiration of a fortnight we reached Milan, which was one of the Italian cities that had been recommended as a suitable dwelling-place for Miss Maitland. She had drooped considerably during the latter portion of the journey; and I had frequently conjured her to make a halt for some days, so that she might regain her failing strength: but she had persevered in travelling onward, though by short stages and at an easy pace, until we arrived at our destination. She had longed to breathe the air of an Italian clime, with the hope that it would do her good: but only faint indeed was this hope—for though she generally abstained from mentioning her gloomy presentiments in my presence, yet from a variety of indications I saw but too plainly that she felt she was not long for this world.

On arriving at Milan she experienced all the overpowering effects of the long journey that had been performed; and I was compelled immediately to call in professional assistance. Fortunately there

was an English physician of great celebrity established at Milan; and his services were made available. He behaved to us in the kindest and most considerate manner: for having recommended that Miss Maitland should be removed as soon as possible from amidst the noise and bustle of an hotel, he undertook to procure suitable apartments in a quiet and respectable house situated in one of the healthiest and most agreeable suburbs of the city. To these we removed in the course of a few days; and Laura appeared to profit by the tranquillity thus obtained, as well as by the salubrious air breathed in that district.

Two months passed away; and now a change came over her for the worse. She spat blood frequently, and there were many indications of a rapid decline which both alarmed and afflicted me seriously. At length I one day seized an opportunity to ask the physician his frank and candid opinion relative to my poor friend's case; but he gave me little hope that she would survive many months. I was almost heart-broken at this intelligence; and yet it was precisely that which I had anticipated to receive. I considered it to be now my duty to lose no time in making Mr. and Mrs. Kingston aware of the position of their beloved young relative: but I did not let Laura know that I wrote to them thus earnestly and seriously. Indeed, I pressed them to come, if possible—or at least Mrs. Kingston—to remain with Laura during the short time she had yet to live. For more reasons than one did I desire that Mrs. Kingston should accede to this solicitation on my part. I did not like to sustain the whole weight of the grave responsibility which was now resting upon my shoulders, as the only friend and confidante whom the poor perishing Laura had near her. I thought it necessary that if she had any worldly concerns to settle, she should have some relative near her to counsel or assist in such a task: for it was a subject upon which I could not utter a word. Neither was I certain that it was prudent for the hapless young lady to remain at Milan, although the physician assured me that she could not possibly be better elsewhere, and that to remove her would be but to precipitate the catastrophe. Nevertheless, in this as in all other matters connected with Miss Maitland, I was anxious that Mrs. Kingston should judge for herself: so that in no single sense could I hereafter incur the possibility of blame for what I was now doing.

At the expiration of twelve days Mr. and Mrs. Kingston reached Milan. They in the first instance put up at an hotel, and then sent a private intimation to me of their arrival. I hastened to see them; and the account which I had now to give of their young relative, was even far worse than that which my letter had already conveyed. Indeed, during that interval of twelve days the symptoms of Miss Maitland's approaching dissolution had grown more and more alarming: the beautiful flower was fading fast—and yet seemed unconscious of the rapidity of its own decline. Mrs. Kingston was overwhelmed with grief, and the good-hearted Squire sobbed aloud.

The difficulty now was how to make known to Laura their presence at Milan, without producing a shock, and smiting her as it were with a conviction that her own state was so dangerous as to have led her relatives thus to be with her during the last

moments of her life. It was this difficulty which they themselves had foreseen and fully appreciated when they sent a private message announcing their arrival to me. We sent for the physician to take his advice upon the subject; and he suggested that Mrs. Kingston should proffer the venial untruth that the state of her own health had prompted her to visit Italy—and that as her young relative was at Milan, she as a matter of course decided upon settling herself in the same city for a short period. This plan was agreed upon; and Mrs. Kingston accompanied me to the lodgings. She remained in the dining-room, while I proceeded to Laura's chamber to acquaint her first of all that her cousin was near at hand. For some days past poor Laura had been confined to that chamber, though she did not altogether keep her bed, but sat up for some hours in an easy chair. As delicately as I was able—in terms as measured and cautious as I could command,—but without appearing to exercise such a nicely studied prudence,—indeed, with an assumed air of cheerfulness, I began by telling my invalid friend that she was about to receive a very agreeable surprise; and then I went on to make her aware that Mrs. Kingston was coming to see her. Never shall I forget the look which Laura Maitland bent upon me as she received this announcement. It was a look which showed that she comprehended it all—that she gratefully appreciated the delicacy which was being observed towards her—and that her soul was filled with a soft and beatific resignation to the will of heaven. Oh! that look—it was replete with an angelic sweetness! It was indeed a heavenly light itself—not strongly irradiating her pale countenance, but playing softly and gently upon those beauteous features. She gave me her thin white hand: I pressed it to my lips—the tears gushed forth from my eyes—I could not possibly restrain them. Laura drew me towards her: she wound her arms about my neck—saying in the fluid tones of her soft mild voice, “Do not weep for me, dearest Mary! I know that I am going hence soon: but it is to a better and happier sphere, where only angels dwell. And now hasten and fetch in my dear cousin: I am prepared to receive her.”

I went forth from that chamber with a profound sadness in my heart: for I knew full well that it would soon be the chamber of death! When I entered the dining-room, Mrs. Kingston at once saw that I had been weeping—and my tears gushed forth afresh. I was for some moments unable to describe what had just passed between Laura and myself.

“No deceit—no subterfuge is necessary, my dear Mrs. Kingston,” I at length said; “for your poor cousin understands it all. Come with me—she is prepared to see you: she exhibits the sweet resignation of an angel.”

Mrs. Kingston accompanied me to the sick chamber; and very affecting—full of a deep and touching pathos—was the meeting between the two cousins. And, Oh! what a contrast did they present; and how impossible would it have been for Mrs. Kingston to have made any one, even the most credulous, believe that she was in ill-health. For though her countenance was pale through grief on her cousin's behalf—not through the fatigues of recent travelling, for these this Amazonian lady was not susceptible of,—yet notwithstanding that

palor, it was easy to perceive in her fine form and general appearance, all the evidences of a vigorous constitution. She was a superb woman—remarkably handsome; and in the sculptural richness of her symmetry did she contrast with the sad and painful thinness of her poor cousin's wasted form—that form which had itself once been of such fine proportions! And the paleness, too, which sat upon Laura's countenance, and which was only relieved by the two hectic spots that burnt upon her cheeks, was that which at once strikes as not being transient—as not being the effect of any temporary cause—but the paleness which belongs unto death itself.

Having conducted Mrs. Kingston to that chamber, I was about to withdraw, thinking it better to leave the two cousins alone for a little while: but Laura called me back, saying she had no secrets which “her dear sister Mary”—for so she affectionately called me—might not hear: and then she told Mrs. Kingston how kind I was to her—how unwearied in my attentions—how delicate in all my ministrations—and how much she had reason to love me.

“I know, dear Lizzy,” she said, “that Mary wrote to you to come—I am sure she did. It was most kind on her part—most kind also on your's to obey the summons. And I know, too, wherefore she *did* write to you to come. Ah! my dear friends, think not that I am ignorant of my actual position! I know that I have but a short time to live: but you see that I am resigned. Do not apprehend, my dear cousin, that while you are with me, your feelings will be distressed by demonstrations of sorrowing and affliction on my part. I may not be cheerful—but at least I shall not be woe-begone. For a long time past I have learnt, as it were, to look Death in the face: and it is even a source of consolation that the destroyer has approached me thus slowly and stealthily, instead of striking me down all of a sudden. Except the dear friends who manifest so loving an interest in me, I have naught in this world worth living for. I am not therefore afraid of death: nor do I sorrow at its approach. To die is the lot of us all: we come into the world condemned to death from the very moment of our birth: it is even the condition upon which we are born and receive our being. We are all therefore doomed to die, but with reprieves of a longer or shorter duration. Weep not therefore for me, my dear friends! weep not, I beseech you!”

But we *were* both weeping—and bitterly too: it was utterly impossible to restrain our tears as that mild angelic voice thus poured forth the soft and liquid language of holiest resignation. By a powerful effort—as I could indeed well perceive—Mrs. Kingston was the first to conquer her emotions: and then she mentioned to Laura that the Squire had accompanied her into Italy, and that he was most anxious to see her. A message was at once despatched to the hotel, requesting Mr. Kingston's presence; and in a short time he arrived. Never shall I forget the grief which this kind hearted gentleman displayed when he was introduced to Laura's chamber. He sobbed and wept like a child—he went down upon his knees—and as he pressed his young relative's thin wasted hand to his lips, he was so convulsed with his emotions that it appeared as if his heart would break. The

perishing young lady who was the object of all this genuine and affectionate sympathy, had now to become the consoler: and this part she performed in a manner which endeared her to us more, if possible, than ever. Oh! it was shocking to a degree to contemplate the idea of losing that excellent creature, and having her snatched away, while yet so young, from this world!—yes, shocking to reflect that the being who was yet with us, would in a few short months—perhaps even in a few weeks—be a silent and shrouded slumberer in the tomb!

By Laura's earnest request Mr. and Mrs. Kingston took up their abode in the same house where we dwelt, and where there were fortunately unoccupied apartments at the time. Soon after their removal to these lodgings, a very serious consultation was held by Mr. Kingston with the physician, as to the propriety of removing Laura to a still more southern city. The physician, with a delicate apprehension that his own opinion might possibly be ascribed to selfishness, suggested that two or three of the most eminent Milanese practitioners should be called in, when Mr. Kingston might act in pursuance of the advice they should give. But to this proposal the Squire would not assent. In the first place, he knew it would only annoy and agitate poor Miss Maitland; and in the second place, he did not wish to pay so ill a compliment to the English physician, who was evidently a straightforward as well as a clever and kind-hearted man. It was therefore resolved that Laura should remain where she was. I should observe that it was now the month of February: and the weather which had all along continued mild in its character and equable in its temperature, began to grow warmer, yet without mists or humidity in the evenings; and thus, being perfectly salubrious, there was nothing to apprehend on the part of the climate as having a tendency to precipitate the catastrophe which was already but too near. Everything was done to render the invalid's chamber as cheerful as possible. The casements looked upon a spacious garden belonging to the house; and beyond the boundary-fence there was a continuation of other and still larger gardens, that stretched up to the ramparts, which, with their avenues of tall trees, closed the view at a distance of about three quarters of a mile. Between the house which we occupied, and the fortifications, there was no other building: and thus the delightful view of evergreen verdure was unbroken. The Squire lavished gold to procure the most delicate plants and beautiful flowers which could be purchased at that season, to place in the verandah outside the windows of the invalid's chamber: the most delicious fruits were obtained to tempt her appetite; and I do verily believe that if she had expressed any particular whim or fancy, the kind-hearted Squire would have gone to the uttermost ends of the earth, or have lavished all his fortune, in order to procure the means of gratifying it. But Laura had no whims and no fancies. There was an extraordinary placidity characterizing her mien, her language, and her entire conduct, during the last weeks of her existence. Her resignation was complete: she received all our attentions with the most amiable sweetness; and if she beheld a tear trickling down the cheek of any one of us, she would administer the holiest consolations. There was something ineffably pathetic, profoundly touching,

and sublimely interesting in the deportment of this young lady, as she thus passed onward to the tomb. Her religion was sincere without the slightest affectation of a self-mortifying sanctimoniousness: and frequently her most cheerful intervals were those when she was engaged in prayer. Mrs. Kingston and I were almost constantly with her; and if one had occasion to go out, the other remained in the sick chamber. The Squire passed several hours there every day; and when not with his dying cousin, he would sit mournfully in another room, or wander about in the garden at the rear of the dwelling, quite a forlorn and desolate creature. Or else he would go forth into the flower-markets and amongst the gardeners, to procure some new rarity in the shape of tender plant or floral beauty,—satisfied, on his return, if it only served to engage the poor invalid's attention for a few minutes. Thus the platform of the verandah became crowded with evergreens and flowers, all flourishing even in the open air, in that climate; and amongst them were orange and lemon-trees—together with some choice specimens of delicate plants and delicious fruits properly belonging to the tropics. Laura was deeply touched by all the Squire's delicate attentions; and it was indeed most gratifying as well as profoundly affecting, to observe how this gentleman whose occupations had ever been of a somewhat rude and boisterous nature—delighting in horses, and dogs, and manly sports—could thus readily turn his mind to the softer and gentler task of comforting the invalid. It was perhaps one of the noblest chapters in his life—and certainly displayed the natural kindness of his disposition in the most admirable point of view. Frequently did Laura beg of him to hire a horse and take the exercise that he so much loved, and to which he had ever been so accustomed. In order to please her he promised he would: but he never did;—and often in a voice almost choked with sobs, would he tell me that he had not the heart to do anything that savoured of cheerfulness and gaiety.

The Kingstons had been nearly a month at Milan—it was the beginning of March—and about fifteen months had elapsed since Eustace. Quentin had embarked in his commercial speculations. I have already said that when I parted from him at the end of October, he was full of sanguine hope as to the result of those enterprises: I must now add that during the four months which had elapsed since I left England, we had frequently corresponded, and all his letters were couched in the same cheerful terms. But unhappily the result did not answer his expectations; and at the time I was thus plunged in grief on account of my poor dying friend, I was destined to receive a severe blow from another quarter. One morning a letter, the address of which was in Eustace's well-known writing, was put into my hand; and I retired to my chamber to read it. By the opening words I at once saw that I must prepare myself for evil tidings. Eustace commenced by entreating me to summon all my fortitude to my aid, and arm myself with all my courage when entering upon the perusal of that letter. I will not lay it at length before my readers: but I will explain the sum and substance of it to the best of my ability.

It will be remembered that in the first instance Eustace had repaired to Liverpool to charter a ship

for the oriental trade; and for many reasons he was compelled to confide, to a great extent, in a person of business-habits who had been recommended as fully competent to assist him in his enterprise. To this individual, whose name was Abbott, he had entrusted the requisite sum of money to insure the ship and the cargo; and this amount was a large one. Placing implicit reliance on Mr. Abbott, he had never entertained the slightest doubt as to the insurances being effected; and by some oversight he did not ask for the documentary proofs that the needful formalities had been fulfilled. Intelligence had recently arrived in England to the effect that the ship had been wrecked on the coast of Malaya, and that it had gone to pieces, the whole of the valuable freight being lost. Most of the crew were drowned, including the captain and the supercargo: and but three or four sailors survived, to work their passage homeward in another ship and bring the unfortunate tidings to England. The calamity, even at the first view, was a severe one, and inflicted a cruel blow upon poor Eustace: but still he had consoled himself with the belief that it was not irreparable, as the money arising from the insurances would cover his loss. He therefore concluded that it was a mere question of time, and that he had his work to do all over again. But the full magnitude of his misfortune was soon made known to him. Mr. Abbott had basely and villanously deceived him—the money for the insurances had never been paid—and when Eustace, half-frenzied at the discovery thus made, hastened to demand an account of his perfidious friend, the traitor was not to be found. He had absconded—and Eustace was utterly ruined. Nay, more—he was even worse than ruined: for the catastrophe left him encumbered with an enormous weight of debt. He had hired the ship entirely on his own account—he was answerable for its loss—and the value put upon it by the owners was no less than eight thousand pounds. This amount they of course expected him to pay. In addition thereto he had obtained consignments of large quantities of goods from mercantile firms, his own capital not having been sufficient to enable him to pay ready money for all the articles which made up his valuable freight. Nor was this all: for he had been induced, upon Abbott's representations, to accept bills of exchange in order to further some speculation which that person alleged himself to have in hand; and thus, what with one thing and another, Captain Quentin suddenly found himself indebted to the enormous amount of twenty-seven thousand pounds.

Such was the substance of the terrible tidings conveyed to me in his letter. The narrative of this complication of disasters was broken as gradually and as delicately as his own generous heart could prompt, or as language would permit: but nevertheless the blow struck me with all the violence of a sudden shock. I was overwhelmed with affliction—I was seized with consternation and dismay. It appeared to be a dreadful dream! Eustace assured me in his letter that he had hesitated for many hours before he could bring himself to chronicle the full details of his misfortunes; and even when he had resolved to undertake the task, he had made a dozen beginnings before any one appeared to him to be sufficiently preparatory for what was to follow,—his object being to spare my feelings as



much as possible. He likewise stated that he had in the first instance trembled to send me this catalogue of calamities at all; but on mature reflection he had decided that it would be better to exercise the fullest candour and let me know the worst. He had now no plans—and therefore no hopes. He was a ruined young man: he knew not even how to raise as many hundreds as he owed thousands: he was at the mercy of his creditors. But not for an instant did he think of appealing to his mother or his brother: he would fight the world's battle by himself. At all events he would never accept any compromise, or yield to any conditions which his relatives might suggest: because he would not deliberately and formally renounce me—and without such renunciation, he knew that nothing would be done for him. And yet, in terms of the deepest pathos, he expressed his dire apprehension that the barrier which had previously prevented our union, had now become insurmountable. He knew

not how to address me on the subject: he dared not reiterate his oft-repeated prayer that I would consent to become his wife—for he was a ruined man, and he could not think of dragging me down into the depths of his own poverty: but he concluded by a solemn declaration that happen what might, he would ever remain faithful to the love which he bore me—he should ever cherish my image—and were the wealth of the Indies placed at his disposal as the condition that he should marry another, he would spurn the offer.

I have already said that this letter filled me with consternation and despair: it seemed to be a blow from which I could not possibly recover. Its weight was overwhelming. But let it not be thought that my affliction was selfish, and that it was occasioned by the destruction of the hope that the success of Captain Quentin's commercial speculations would have enabled him to make me his bride. I will not for a moment pretend that this

disappointment formed *no* ingredient of the deep and bitter anguish which the letter excited: but ten thousand times more did I grieve on his own account. Oh! the idea that this noble-hearted, this generous young man should have sacrificed everything for me, and should thus be brought down into the vortex of ruin—deprived of his all—frustrated in his honest emulation—baffled in his high-minded aspiration—overwhelmed with debts—without a ray of hope to cheer him—and perhaps with a prison staring him in the face,—these thoughts were replete with the anguish of crucifixion! My heart felt as if impaled. I seemed to be balancing between death from despair, and the frenzy of utter madness. What could I do? Even if I were not chained to my present residence at Milan, by all the sacred ties of friendship, gratitude, duty, and love, which bound me to Laura—of what avail would it be to fly to England? what solace could I impart? what hope could I proffer? None—none! I was powerless to assist the unhappy Eustace in the magnitude of his calamity: the Titan power of misfortune had heaped mountains and mountains of woes and embarrassments, afflictions and sorrows, upon him; and none but an equally gigantic hand could lift the overwhelming weight. Alas! mine was not that hand—poor weak woman that I was: I could lay down my life for him, if the sacrifice would purchase his redemption—but it would not—no, it would not!—and there was naught else that I could do.

But I reasoned with myself that it was absolutely necessary I should bury my tremendous affliction deep in the recesses of my own heart. To betray all I felt in the presence of Laura, would be to plunge her into the distress which her sympathizing soul was but too sure to experience; and not for worlds would I have placed a thorn in the pillow which supported the head of that perishing creature. Yes—my mind was made up to entomb the secret of my sorrows in the profundity of my own soul—to keep it sepulchred in my own bosom—to maintain constant ward over every word and look on my part, lest I should betray it, and thus cruelly afflict the dear friend who was passing away. Such was the resolve I took: such was the stern and imperious duty which I imposed upon myself. And yet I knew how hard—how difficult—how almost impossible was the task!

But what should I say to Eustace? how should I write to him? Oh, I must not delay proffering him all the counsel and solace which it was in my power to give! I took up my pen: it ran fast over the sheet of paper to which I committed my thoughts—for those thoughts themselves flowed even more quickly than I could thus record them. I conjured him not to abandon himself to despair. I bade him reflect that for his own sake he must adopt whatsoever course would enable him to acquit himself honourably of the debts he had contracted. I told him that it was now his bounden duty to make any sacrifice in order to accomplish that aim. I besought him to consider that if his honour were in one scale and his love in another, it was absolutely necessary to let the former outweigh the latter. I counselled him to proceed at once to his mother and brother—tell them all—and submit to any conditions which they might seek to impose, so long as they would succour him in a pe-

cuinary sense. At the same time I gave him fully to understand how bitterly I deplored the necessity of proffering him an advice that was the death-blow to my own hopes, as well as to those which he had so generously and affectionately cherished with regard to me. I said that it appeared to be written in heaven that, much as we had loved, we were not destined for each other: but I could not help adding my own resolve to remain single all my life, as the only tribute I could possibly pay to the shrine of withered hopes and disappointed affections. In a postscript I besought Eustace not to be offended with me for remitting him such funds as I had at my disposal; and I assured him that if he did not render them available for his immediate wants, it would only be increasing the poignancy of the affliction I already experienced.

Having finished my letter, I examined into the state of my finances. The reader will remember that when I first took up my residence with Miss Maitland, I had received from her (through Mrs. Kingston) two hundred pounds; and I must now state,—which I omitted to do in the proper place,—that at the expiration of the first year of my companionship with Laura, I had one morning found on my dressing-table a second sum to a similar amount, my annual income being thus paid in advance. The greatest inroad that had been made upon my finances, apart from my own personal requirements, was the outlay at Dover for the benefit of the Messieurs: but altogether I could command three hundred pounds. I hastened with this amount to an English banker who was established at Milan, and through whom Miss Maitland had received remittances. From him I obtained a draft payable in London to the order of Captain Eustace Quentin: and speeding back to the house, I enclosed it in my letter, which I then despatched to the post.

Days wore on; and neither Mr. or Mrs. Kingston, nor Laura, had the least reason to suppose that I had received evil intelligence from any particular quarter. I was already mournful enough at the spectacle of my dying friend: but I did my best—indeed, it was almost a superhuman power that I exerted—to prevent my looks from showing that I had another and distinct source of additional sorrow. Thus my grief on account of poor Eustace was pent up as much as possible during the day; or else it blended with the tears which I frequently shed in the presence of the Squire or of Mrs. Kingston, when we conversed upon poor Laura's condition. But at night, when it was my turn to seek my chamber previous to relieving Mrs. Kingston in watching the invalid, all the fulness of my anguish would burst forth; and I would weep for Eustace unrestrainedly, as I likewise wept for Laura. At the expiration of a fortnight I received a letter from him. It enclosed me my bank-bill back again. This was far from unexpected on my part—but quite contrary to my wishes. Eustace wrote in a strain of most impassioned tenderness. He thanked me over and over again for my kind consideration in remitting him the money, assuring me that if he were actually in need of it, he would not hesitate to accept of succour from such a source: for even if circumstances no longer permitted him to regard me in the light of his intended

bride, yet he never should consider me otherwise than as the dearest and best-beloved friend he had upon the face of the earth. But he declared that he had some little resource left,—far too small to offer as an instalment to those who were his creditors for so large an amount—but enough to place a barrier between himself and actual distress for some little time to come. He said that with regard to the love that he bore me, I already knew it was immortal: but in respect to the hope of ever calling me his own, he knew not what to say—and when he thought of his position, it nearly drove him to despair. As for following my advice in respect to seeking his mother and brother, he could do nothing of the kind,—though he fully appreciated all that was noble and delicate (to use his own words) in my conduct when I had suggested a course which necessarily involved the renunciation on his part of even the faint hope which now remained of some day conducting me to the altar. He added that he was consulting a solicitor in respect to his affairs; but without money to liquidate his debts, it was almost useless to place his business in the hands of a legal practitioner. He likewise informed me that his friend Henry Crawford had behaved to him in the handsomest manner. I should observe that the ten thousand pounds he had borrowed of that gentleman, were not included in the twenty-seven thousand pounds of debt for which he found himself immediately liable: nevertheless, the circumstance of owing that sum had troubled him as much as any other of his responsibilities. Immediately upon becoming fully aware of the extent of his loss and the ruin of his enterprise, he had hastened to Mr. Crawford to acquaint him therewith. Sybilla's husband said all that friendship could suggest to console the unfortunate Eustace—and had earnestly pressed him to accept a farther loan. But Eustace would not for worlds avail himself of such a proposition, nor tax Mr. Crawford's kindness to an additional extent. In conclusion, Eustace besought me to write to him soon again, if it were only as a friend: for he had now no other solace in the world than the knowledge that my heart sympathized with him deeply.

Need I avow that I did write to him, and that I said all I could to proffer consolation? But I held out no hope—indeed I dared not—that circumstances could ever so far change as to lead us to the altar. It was about this same time that I read in one of the French newspapers which frequently reached us at Milan, that Captain Tollemache had been tried for the forgery committed upon the banker, and that he was sentenced to twenty years' labour at the galleys.

Time passed on—weeks and months glided away: the Spring gave additional beauty to the gardens upon which our dwelling looked—Summer came with its unclouded skies and its delicious fruits. But not more surely did nature thus put forth its beauty and its wealth in that Italian clime, than that Laura Maitland was approaching nearer and nearer to the grave. Even in the coolness of midnight the damp of death already seemed to be settling upon her brow,—that forehead of such marble purity, and beneath whose transparent skin the delicate tracery of blue veins was of an unnatural clearness. Her hands and arms were as wan and as slender as those of Byron's beauteous heroine in

the "Siege of Corinth;" the delicate fairness of the complexion of the face and the neck rendered the more vividly striking the bright red that sat, like the death-roses of consumption, upon the cheeks. Full of a sweet resignation were her smiles: full of a soft solace for those around her, were the words she spoke. There was nothing to shock the sight in such a gradual decline as this—but everything to melt the feelings and to touch the heart. Spirit-like and ethereal was the progress of Laura Maitland from this world towards the next. I could scarcely bring myself to think that the fair form which yet held life within it, would soon become a mere lump of clay to moulder in the dust: but it seemed to me as if, when her time came, she would leave the earth as she was to be borne upwards by angel-shapes to the empyrean sphere; and gradually soaring out of sight, shed upon us the soft radiance of her parting smile ere the clouds hid her from our view.

One night—towards the close of July—it was my turn to seek my chamber and take the first few hours of slumber: for Mrs. Kingston and I had ever since her arrival at Milan, shared each night's vigils between us. Thus one was accustomed to sit up the first half of the night and be relieved by the other; and then that other would sit up the first half of the next night, and so on. On this occasion, then, of which I am specially speaking, it was Mrs. Kingston's turn to sit up the first half, and I was to relieve her at about two in the morning. I lay down—and contrary to my habit for some time past, soon fell into a profound slumber. For weeks and months I had not slept well: my mind was always racked with grief on account of Laura, and with distressing thoughts on behalf of Eustace. For some time past, too, I had perceived that my health was failing through care and anxiety: but I had breathed no complaint—I was cautious not to do so, for fear of alarming Laura on my account, or of inducing Mrs. Kingston to take upon herself more than her fair share of the night's vigils. But upon this occasion, as I have already stated, sleep overtook me almost as soon as my head touched the pillow—and I slumbered profoundly. I was suddenly awakened by a knocking at my chamber door: I started up—the sound struck upon my brain as being ominous of the presence of death in the house. The maid entered; and by the light that burnt in the room, I at once saw enough in her distressed and tearful looks, to convince me that the worst was now at hand. To the half-stifled question which I put, as I sprang forth and began to hurry on a wrapper that lay at hand, the maid replied in an equally suffocated voice, that Miss Maitland still lived, but that Mrs. Kingston feared the last moments were at hand, and the physician had been sent for.

Half distracted, notwithstanding that I had for so long a time seen death approaching my beloved friend with stealthy but unerring steps,—I flew towards her chamber. It was only when close by the door that I recollected the necessity to avoid all excitement of feeling as much as possible. Conquering the frenzy of my emotions as well as I was able, I entered that chamber. Laura lay half-supported in the arms of Mrs. Kingston, whose countenance expressed the direst woe. The poor young lady was in a state of unconsciousness; and a kerchief which Mrs. Kingston held in one hand, and

with which she had just wiped the lips of her dying relative, revealed to me by the sanguine stains that she had broken a blood-vessel internally. She yet lived: but her feeble gaspings showed too plainly that the final moment was near at hand;—and sinking upon my knees by the side of the couch, I could no longer restrain my tears. Mr. Kingston now entered the room; and a few minutes afterwards the physician, for whom a domestic had been despatched in all haste, made his appearance. But human aid availed not now—and in a few minutes all was over. Laura Maitland was no more.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE WILL.

I PASS over all description of the immense sorrow experienced by Mr. and Mrs. Kingston and myself: I pass over likewise all details respecting the funeral. Two days after the obsequies we left Milan, journeying towards France for the purpose of making our way as speedily as possible back to England. That was a mournful journey: little was the conversation that took place between us during the week that it occupied; and by a tacit understanding we abstained as much as possible from mentioning the name of the deceased—for at even the slightest allusion to the departed Laura, would our grief burst forth anew. We reached Paris—we made but a brief halt there—we continued our way to Calais—we crossed to Dover—and thence proceeded to Kingston Grange. There, by the earnest solicitation of the Squire and his wife, I took up my abode for the present: for I had not spirits to think of any plan in respect to the future.

Several days passed after our arrival at the Grange before we could bring ourselves to mention Laura's name with any degree of composure: nor was it until now that I learnt the full details of the scene which had preceded my entrance to the death-chamber at Milan. It appeared that Mrs. Kingston was sitting near the couch where Laura lay, and where for an hour past she had been wrapped in a gentle sleep,—when all of a sudden Mrs. Kingston heard a gurgling sound; and starting up in dismay, she perceived the blood oozing from her cousin's lips. She then found that the invalid had just awakened,—yes, awakened from her last earthly sleep to pass full soon into that of death! Speeding to the bell-pull, Mrs. Kingston rang it violently, and then hastened to raise Laura in her arms and to wipe away the blood from her lips. The poor young lady was at the moment completely conscious, and endeavoured to speak. But she was only able to give utterance to a few words—and these were as follow:—"Where is dear Mary?—I am dying—tell her—" She could say no more—her strength failed her: she endeavoured to gasp forth something else—but the syllables died upon her lips. She then sank into unconsciousness, whence she awoke not again; and it was in this state that I had found her when I repaired to the room.

Such were the brief but pathetic details which Mrs. Kingston gave me; and I was profoundly touched on hearing that my poor deceased friend's last thoughts had fixed themselves upon me. I was

overwhelmed with grief: its poignancy was all excited again, and on that day we spoke of her no more. But we thought of her—and every time we looked at each other, the sad expression of our countenances showed that we mutually understood whose image was uppermost in our minds.

At the expiration of a few more days, Mrs. Kingston took an opportunity of again speaking to me alone. She said, "My dear Mary, it seems to me to savour of a worldly-minded callousness to approach the subject which I am about to touch upon: but nevertheless it is necessary. As you are aware, I brought away with me my poor deceased cousin's effects; and this morning the Squire and I nerved ourselves to perform a duty which, however painful, we felt to be imperious. This was to examine the writing-desk of poor Laura, and to look amongst her papers for any testamentary instructions she might have left behind her. We felt assured, dear Mary, that she had bequeathed to you the whole—or at least the greater part of her fortune: we not only expected it, but we sincerely hoped that it would prove so. I will even tell you more," continued Mrs. Kingston, taking my hand and pressing it with a warm sisterly kindness: "had she made any bequest to me, it was understood between my husband and myself that I should transfer it to you. But we have found nothing amongst Laura's papers to indicate the mode in which she desired her fortune to be disposed of. Are you aware, Mary, whether she ever made a will—and if so, where it is to be sought after?"

At first when Mrs. Kingston had begun speaking to me of my deceased friend, all my grief burst forth again: but when she proceeded to talk of her belief that Laura's fortune would be left to me, I was seized with amazement,—an amazement, indeed, so strong that it absorbed for the moment all the bitterness of my grief. For I myself had never entertained such an idea: I had never even given the subject a thought. No—not once had it ever occurred to me to speculate upon the manner in which Miss Maitland would leave her property at her death. I had always shuddered too profoundly at the idea of that death, not to avert my thoughts from it to the utmost of my power; and as for ever reflecting for a single moment what would be the probable result thereof in respect to my own worldly condition, I was incapable of such heartless selfishness.

"I see, Mary," resumed Mrs. Kingston, "that I have taken you by surprise, and that I have touched upon a topic which has startled you. Again I say, that I myself have approached it with diffidence: it seems to be almost a desecration of the dead to pass from the holiest and purest memories into worldly-minded considerations. But I repeat—it is necessary that whatever instructions she may have left behind her should be fulfilled: this is a duty that we owe to the departed. For myself, I am unable to furnish any clue to what her wishes might have been in respect to her property. Often and often as we were alone together—hours and hours as daily and nightly we passed by ourselves when it was my turn to watch by her side—she never breathed a syllable upon that topic. Nor did I venture to intrude such a theme upon her consideration. The serenity of her mind naturally led me to suppose that she had settled her affairs in this world, and that she was thus enabled to fix her thoughts so

calmly and tranquilly upon the next. It is therefore for you, Mary, to acquaint me with any circumstances which, having come to your knowledge, may lead to the elucidation of our deceased Laura's views and wishes on the subject I have mentioned."

"My dear Mrs. Kingston," was my reponse, "I am totally unable to give you any information on the subject—Unless indeed," I added, as a sudden recollection struck me, "a solicitor by the name of Wenlock may have been consulted by our deceased friend, and entrusted by her with some special injunctions. For it now occurs to me that previous to our departure from England, poor Laura sent for this Mr. Wenlock; and he called several times. I also remember," I continued, as these circumstances came back one by one to my mind, "that Mr. Wenlock brought some papers with him, and was accompanied on a particular occasion by his head clerk and a tradesman from the neighbourhood."

"Then no doubt," observed Mrs. Kingston, "a will was made, and those persons were the witnesses. If so, the testamentary document was probably left with Mr. Wenlock, or else deposited by Laura at her banker's. The Squire shall write to-day to both. But after what you have told me, I am more than ever assured that Laura must have bequeathed at least some portion of her property to you; and that therefore, as you were interested in her will, you could not be one of the witnesses. If it were otherwise, she would no doubt have asked you to attest it, instead of giving any tradesman from the neighbourhood an insight into her affairs. Besides, I am convinced it must have been the intention as well as it was the duty of Laura to provide handsomely for you, considering all your devoted kindness towards her."

"There was no duty in that respect, my dear Mrs. Kingston," I said: "and I hope you will give me credit for all possible sincerity when I assure you that no thought of the kind—no expectation of such a nature as you have mentioned—ever entered my head. Whatsoever attention I showed to dear Miss Maitland, was a duty on my part, as well as a proof of my love and attachment to her. In any other point of view I was liberally and handsomely recompensed—"

"My dear Mary," interrupted Mrs. Kingston, "you are endeavouring to justify yourself against a suspicion of selfishness which no one having the slightest acquaintance with you, could possibly entertain. It is necessary we should thus converse respecting the affairs of my deceased cousin: it is likewise necessary that they should be investigated. For more reasons than one, the Squire and myself sincerely hope that there is a will. You must pardon me, dear Mary, if I repeat that one of these reasons is founded on the hope that you have been well provided for: another is to prevent a worthless character from acquiring the right, as heir-at-law, to lay his hand on my deceased cousin's fortune. You regard me with some surprise—and I therefore suppose that the name of Theobald Maitland has never been mentioned in your hearing?"

"Yes," I answered after a little reflection: "I have heard that name. I remember that Laura once received a letter which gave her a great deal of pain. It was only a few weeks before we left England. She

told me that it came from a cousin of her's bearing the name you have just mentioned, and earnestly importuning her for money to rescue him from some very serious dilemma in which he had become involved—I think it was in Dublin."

"It was so," rejoined Mrs. Kingston. "Laura mentioned it at the time in one of her letters to me. But I am well aware that her generous heart as well as her natural delicacy, would have prevented her from speaking out plainly relative to this cousin of our's. The truth is, Mary, that he is a very bad man, and has so thoroughly disgraced himself that his name has long ceased to be mentioned amongst the circle of his relatives. I will not shock your ears by any unnecessary details of his depravity, profligacy, and even villany: you may be assured that his character must be bad indeed when you hear me speak thus strongly. He had not the slightest claim upon poor Laura's generosity: for at the death of her parents, he disputed her father's will, which left her sole heiress to the fortune that she subsequently received; and in carrying on a lawsuit against Laura's guardians on account of that will, he had recourse to the basest means to further his views. However, I will not linger upon those painful circumstances. Suffice it to say that he was defeated in his object; and therefore you may judge that after such nefarious proceedings, he had no claim upon Laura's generosity. I however know—and perhaps you know likewise—that when he applied to her from Dublin, she did not reject his appeal: she caused two hundred pounds to be remitted to him from her banker's,—accompanied however with an intimation that he must not attempt to communicate with her in future. Now, Mary, you may perhaps understand one of the reasons which render the Squire and myself so anxious on the subject of a will: for this Theobald Maitland is our poor deceased Laura's nearest male relative, and consequently the heir-at-law should she have died intestate."

"I remember perfectly well," said I, "that Laura informed me at the time, of the response she so generously made to Mr. Maitland's appeal; and I also recollect how reserved she was in her observations concerning him, and how promptly she passed from that painful topic to one of a more agreeable nature."

"For many, many reasons," said Mrs. Kingston, in a thoughtful, musing manner, "it would afflict both the Squire and myself if poor Laura's property should pass into the hands of so worthless a man as Theobald Maitland. Into no worse hands could riches possibly fall: they would be squandered amidst the haunts of dissipation, and would be lavished in evil pursuits and in the vilest society. But, no! I am confident that poor Laura, being well aware that such must prove the result of any neglect on her part to make the proper testamentary provision, would not have left a chance of her fortune becoming the heritage of such a character as that. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that my dear cousin must have set all her worldly affairs in order: otherwise she would not have enjoyed such mental calmness during the last few months of her existence."

In the evening of that same day Mrs. Kingston informed me that the Squire had written alike to the banker and to Mr. Wenlock, announcing Miss

Maitland's death, and requesting to be informed whether they held any papers connected with her affairs. By return of post the answers arrived. That from the bankers was to the effect that they held no deeds belonging to the late Miss Maitland; but they had some money of her's in hand, which they were of course prepared to deliver up to any one entitled to receive the same. That of Mr. Wenlock stated that he was in possession of Miss Maitland's will, which she had deposited with him on the eve of her departure from England; and that on proof being given him of her decease, he would show the will to any of her relatives who might call upon him for the purpose, or any friends of the deceased young lady who might suppose themselves to be interested in it. The Squire had obtained, previous to our departure from Milan, the proper certificates to prove Miss Maitland's demise; and it was now determined that we should all three repair to London and call upon Mr. Wenlock. Accordingly, without any delay, we repaired to the metropolis; and took up our quarters at an hotel at the West End of the town. For more reasons than one did we decide that this was better than proceeding to occupy the deceased Miss Maitland's house—although the servants had been left in it, and we might therefore have calculated upon its being in proper order for our reception. But we all three felt a dislike to dwell within those walls where our eyes would be constantly encountering objects painfully reminding us of the departed. We also considered it would be indelicate to assume a right to take possession of that habitation: moreover, until the contents and nature of the will should be made known, there was no certainty as to who might be the executors, and thereby the holders as it were of the keys of that house. I should observe that immediately on our return to England, the domestics had been written to, informing them of the demise of their lamented young mistress, so that they should at once put themselves into the proper mourning apparel.

In the evening on which we arrived in London, Mr. Kingston sent a note by a messenger to Mr. Wenlock, to the effect that we would call upon him on the following day at eleven. Accordingly, at the appointed hour we proceeded to his house, and were at once conducted into one of his private apartments. The servant who escorted us thither, stated that Mr. Wenlock was for the moment engaged with a client, but would join us in a few minutes. We had not been seated there long, when the door opened; and an individual whom I must pause to describe, made his appearance. He was a man whose age, as I afterwards learnt, was in reality not more than six-and-thirty, but who looked at least ten years older. He had perhaps once been good-looking: but his countenance bore the unmistakable signs of inveterate dissipation, and were traced not merely with the lines, but literally with the furrows of the most debauched habits. I have seldom seen a face which at the very first glance so irresistibly impressed me as with a tablet of the darkest passions that can possibly concrete in the human soul. I literally shuddered at the look of this man as he entered the room. There was something villainous indeed, and evil to a degree, in every lineament of that countenance. He was dressed in a handsome suit of black—so handsome

indeed, of such a fashionable style, and with so much pretension, that it scarcely looked like mourning at all: but not even the advantage of an elegant attire could redeem aught of his unpleasant aspect. He was a man whose presence, even in the broad daylight, and under circumstances when he could not be supposed capable of doing any harm, was nevertheless sufficient to make one afraid. Even if I had not at once noticed the expression of aversion and disgust which simultaneously appeared upon the features of Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, I should have known, after all I had previously heard, that this individual was Theobald Maitland.

Totally unabashed—indeed with a brazen effrontery—he sauntered into the room; and accosting the Squire—but without offering his hand—he said in a harsh disagreeable voice, “Well, Mr. Kingston, I suppose that as we meet on so solemn an occasion and after such a loss, there is an end to all animosity and ill will between us?”

“Mr. Maitland,” responded the Squire, coldly, “you will excuse me for observing that I fear from your antecedents as well as from your present demeanour, you do not feel that loss in the same sense as ourselves?”

“And why should you suppose that?” demanded Mr. Theobald Maitland, assuming a sort of hectoring, bullying manner: “who gave you the right to judge of my thoughts?”

“Mr. Maitland,” rejoined the Squire, in a tone of dignified rebuke, “you yourself have said that this is a solemn occasion. I beg that you will consider it so.”

Theobald Maitland darted a fierce look upon Mr. Kingston, as if more than half inclined to do his best to provoke a quarrel: and for a moment he seemed as if about to make some insolent or bitter retort. But evidently thinking better of it, he turned abruptly on his heel—took no notice of Mrs. Kingston—and went and seated himself at the farther extremity of the room, whence he began to stare most impudently at me. I moved my chair closer to that of Mrs. Kingston, and in such a position that I was enabled to turn my back towards him. He then actually began to hum an opera-air,—when the Squire, half starting from his seat, flung upon him such a look of indignation and disgust, that, bully though he evidently was, he became overawed and suddenly ceased that indecorous sound. I saw by Mrs. Kingston's countenance that she was as much annoyed as her husband at the appearance of Theobald Maitland: and I knew full well that were it not for the nature of the circumstances which had brought us thither, they would have lost no time in quitting the room. However, as the will was to be read, and Mr. Maitland was the nearest male relative of the deceased, he had a full right to be present on this occasion,—which right no one could dispute.

Our painful feelings in the company of that man were speedily relieved somewhat by the appearance of Mr. Wenlock, who in a few minutes entered the room. He carried in his hand a tin box, on which the name of Miss Maitland was painted, and which he deposited on the table. Then, immediately recognizing me, he shook me by the hand, and said a few but becoming words of condolence on the melancholy death of my friend. The tears flowed from

my eyes, and I could give no answer. He then addressed himself to my companions, saying that he presumed he had the honour of speaking to Mr. and Mrs. Kingston; and to them also did he offer his condolences.

He now placed himself at the head of the table, where he had deposited the tin box; and he requested us to draw near. The Kingstons and I placed ourselves on the lawyer's right. Mr. Theobald Maitland took a seat on his left; and resting his elbows on the table, he held his hands up to his face, so that he had the appearance of assuming a posture of the utmost attention for what was about to be read. The Squire having produced the certificates proving poor Laura's death at Milan, Mr. Wenlock opened the tin box, and took out some papers tied round with a red tape. From these he selected one which he intimated was the will of the deceased Laura Maitland. He began to read it in a slow and measured voice, as if he were careful that not a single word should be lost. The preamble was in the usual strain of such documents; and then came the manner in which Miss Maitland's property was to be disposed of. This consisted almost entirely of money in the funds, amounting to about thirty-four thousand pounds. The first bequest was of a thousand pounds "to her dearly beloved cousin Elizabeth Kingston." The second bequest was a similar sum "to her affectionate and esteemed friend Mary Price," to whom she also wished that whatsoever articles of jewellery and other personal valuables she might possess at her death, should be given: but her wardrobe, together with the sum of fifty pounds in money, she bequeathed to her maid—the one who had travelled with us on the Continent, and who had accompanied the Kingstons and me back to England. The will then proceeded to recite, that inasmuch as the testatrix, Laura Maitland, had after mature thought arrived at the conviction that her cousin Theobald Maitland had been unfairly and wrongfully treated in respect to the fortune which she herself then enjoyed, she had decided upon making such amends as it would be in her power to offer at her death. She therefore bequeathed the great bulk of her property—all indeed, with the exception of the above-mentioned legacies—to the said Theobald Maitland, in the hope that should he survive her, and thus receive the benefit of this bequest, he would consider that she had fully made every possible atonement on account of the past.

These were the details of the will which Mr. Wenlock read in that slow and measured manner. Theobald Maitland affected,—for I felt at the time it could be naught else than a vile hypocrisy,—to weep and sob when he heard his name mentioned in that document. The Squire and Mrs. Kingston sat perfectly agast. As for myself, I knew not what to think: strange ideas were crowding confusedly into my brain; but heaven is my witness that I experienced not any selfishly personal feeling on the occasion. So far from that, my first sentiment was one of deep gratitude towards my deceased friend that she should have remembered me so munificently and spoken of me in such affectionate terms. Yes—that was my *first* feeling, when the bequest to myself was read from the document, and before Mr. Wenlock came to that part which related to Theobald Maitland: but as I listened to that

clause, and as its provisions were gradually developed the gravest suspicions arose in my mind, absorbing all other sentiments.

"I presume," said the Squire, recovering his self-possession, "that the will is duly attested?"

"It is so," was Mr. Wenlock's quiet and business-like answer.

"Permit me to see those names," said Mr. Kingston.

"Certainly," was the lawyer's response: and he turned the document round in such a manner that not only the Squire, but likewise Mrs. Kingston and myself could examine the signatures.

There was the name of Laura Maitland as the testatrix; and there also were the names of Charles Hunter and Joshua Armstrong as the two witnesses. Mr. and Mrs. Kingston both glanced rapidly but significantly at me, to see if I had any suspicions in respect to those attesting signatures. But I entertained none: for as I had already told them, I had every reason to believe that Mr. Hunter was one of the witnesses to whatsoever paper Laura might have signed ere leaving England; and I recollected that the name of the tradesman brought to the house on the occasion, was Joshua Armstrong.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Kingston looked bewildered and dubious; and as I happened to glance across the table, I noticed that Theobald Maitland, while affecting to wipe his eyes with an elegant embroidered cambric handkerchief, was scanning us all three with penetrating looks. The Squire caught his glance at the same instant: and Mr. Kingston's countenance suddenly losing its bewilderment and uncertainty, assumed an expression of stern decision. Rising from his seat, he said, "Mr. Wenlock, I give you due notice that I shall dispute that will; and I warn you against any attempt to take out a probate until I shall have received the most convincing and satisfactory proofs of its genuine character."

A scowl of the darkest malignity swept across the features of Theobald Maitland at this announcement; and for the moment that the scowl lasted, it seemed to me as if the most horrible things were written upon that man's countenance. As for Mr. Wenlock, his face appeared to be flushed with a sudden indignation, as he said, "Mr. Kingston, you are impugning my honour—you are libelling my respectability: for this will was drawn up by me in obedience to the instructions I received from Miss Maitland—it was duly read over to her previous to receiving her signature—and on being so signed, was legitimately attested. As to the manner in which the property is disposed of, it is to me personally an affair of the utmost indifference, all the parties mentioned herein being comparative strangers to me—"

"Enough, Mr. Wenlock!" interrupted the Squire. "I have informed you of the course which I shall adopt—and it is no idle threat. Come, my dear —come, Mary—let us take our departure."

We accordingly left the room, Mr. Wenlock not saying another word, but bowing with cold hauteur; and Theobald Maitland taking no farther notice of us at all. We re-entered the vehicle which had brought us thither; and for the first few minutes after it drove away, we all three maintained a profound silence.

"I feel convinced," the Squire at length said,

"that there is something wrong in all this. It would be preposterous to suppose for a moment that our poor deceased Laura could ever have so changed her mind in respect to that bad man, as to speak of him in the terms which we have heard recorded in that will. Why, it was but a few months before the will was made, that she had caused a communication to be forwarded to him to the effect that he was to intrude upon her with no more letters."

"I am as profoundly convinced as you are," said Mrs. Kingston, "that there has been foul play. But do you not think, my dear Tom, that before you take any decisive step it would be prudent to see these attesting witnesses?"

"I have every reason to suppose," was the observation I now threw in, "that Mr. Hunter is a respectable man; and though I know little of Mr. Armstrong's character, yet it would be difficult to imagine that a well-established and substantial tradesman could be induced to lead himself to any fraud. I must confess that my own mind is filled with misgivings: but yet, on the other hand, in the face of all I have just said respecting the witnesses, I do not see how those misgivings can be well founded."

"Nevertheless," said the Squire emphatically, "the whole affair shall be sifted to the very bottom. This step I shall take upon pure principle. Heaven knows it is through no sordid feeling of self-interest: for as we are rich, we expected nothing from our dear Laura. Nor is it altogether on your account, Mary, that I will prosecute this matter—although I am certain that Laura would have provided for you more efficiently than she is represented to have done by the document we have just heard. Another motive is to prevent a man of infamous character from profiting by a fraud, if a fraud has been really perpetrated. Did I believe that the details of that document were the expression of the deceased Laura's wishes and intents ere she was taken from us, no one would pay a more solemn deference thereto than myself: and not for worlds would I raise the slightest quibble on that score! But there is within me the irresistible conviction that some black turpitude has been accomplished; and hence my firm resolve to have the matter investigated. I am acquainted with a highly respectable, though shrewd and sharp-sighted solicitor in London; and I will proceed to consult him at once."

We arrived at the hotel, where Mr. Kingston left his wife and me while he repaired to the office of Mr. Longman, the solicitor to whom he had alluded, and whose place of business was in Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. So soon as Mrs. Kingston and I were alone together, she said, "Pardon me, my dear Mary, for the observation I am about to make: but I know full well there is some one in London in whom you are much interested; and if you think fit to write and ask him to call upon you here, you know that you are perfectly welcome to do so."

I understood what Mrs. Kingston meant—she alluded to Eustace Quentin. At the moment I felt inclined to reveal to her the sad circumstances of his losses and ruin: but knowing her generous heart, and likewise the liberal disposition of her husband, I feared that if I explained Captain Quentin's position, it might have the effect of an appeal to their purse on his behalf; and I was well aware that his own honourable sentiments would

prevent him from accepting any succour which he could see no prospect of repaying, and the refusal of which would nevertheless pain those by whom it was certain to be proffered. Moreover, I felt that Mr. and Mrs. Kingston had both enough to occupy their minds at present in respect to the will case, without having other matters—particularly those which related to myself, forced upon their attention. So I kept back the communication I was about to make: but with the warmest acknowledgements of gratitude, I expressed an intention to avail myself of the kind lady's permission to receive a visit from Eustace Quentin at the hotel. I accordingly wrote him a letter, informing him that I was in London, and that though perhaps under existing circumstances we ought not to meet, yet I could not possibly bring myself to be guilty of such an unkind act as to interdict an interview. I accordingly appointed the afternoon of the following day to see him, and despatched my letter to the post.

It was about three o'clock when Mr. Kingston returned from his consultation with Mr. Longman. The solicitor, after hearing all that the Squire had to tell him, decided upon issuing what was called a *caveat* , or injunction, against the probate of the will; so that while the affair should thus remain in suspense, Mr. Theobald Maitland would be unable to make good his claim or receive the money at the Bank of England. But Mr. Longman had expressed his desire that, as I was well acquainted with Charles Hunter's wife, I should lose no time in making certain inquiries, the nature of which was explained to me. Moreover, as I had lived with Miss Maitland for so long a time in the same neighbourhood as Joshua Armstrong, I might perhaps prosecute my inquiries with this person also. There being a sufficiency of the day remaining for these purposes, I resolved to enter upon my task at once; and accordingly proceeded once more—but, on this occasion, alone by myself—to the vicinity of Hammersmith.

On reaching the little cottage-residence where Mr. Hunter and Jemima had established themselves on their marriage, I was much surprised to find it shut up—a board intimating that it was to be let. What could be the meaning of this? I was utterly at a loss to understand it. But the idea occurred to me that not finding the house to suit—although at first Jemima was infinitely pleased with it—they might have removed elsewhere. I accordingly made inquiries amongst the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood, but all I could ascertain was that Mr. and Mrs. Hunter had taken their departure about ten days back, leaving their house to let ready furnished. I could not however learn whether they had removed to some other dwelling in the district, or whether they had left it altogether: nor could the persons whom I thus questioned, inform me whether Mr. Hunter was still in Mr. Wenlock's employment. I went back to the shut-up house to examine the board once more; and thus ascertained to whom application was to be made for the hiring of the premises. It appeared that such applications were to be made at a particular address in an adjacent street. Thither I proceeded, and found the place to be a small carpenter's shop. The man himself was out: but I saw his wife—an elderly person—who told me that she had the key of Mr. Hunter's cottage, and that



she was entrusted with the duty of showing it to applicants, and also of keeping it in good order till it should be let; but that neither she nor her husband had the power of letting it: any person who might decide upon taking the premises, was to be referred to Mr. Wenlock for the final settlement of terms. In answer to another query which I put, the woman told me that Mr. and Mrs. Hunter had gone away—she did not exactly know why or whither: but she thought she remembered hearing Mr. Hunter say that he had obtained a much better situation in some other part of the country.

As I walked slowly away from the carpenter's shop, I could not help thinking that the whole affair connected with the will was assuming a darker aspect; and in spite of myself, the most unpleasant misgivings crept into my mind respecting the share which Mr. Hunter might have borne in it. This abrupt departure from the neighbourhood—accompanied too, as it seemed, with a certain degree of

mystery—was, to say the least of it, suspicious: but well aware was I that even if Charles Hunter should have proved so different from the good opinion I had entertained of him, his wife—the kind-hearted and unsophisticated Jemima—was assuredly no accomplice in his dishonesty. But what was I to do now? I bethought me of the instructions I had received to pay a visit to Mr. Armstrong, who was a tea-dealer and grocer. I accordingly repaired to his shop, and found him serving with his assistants behind the counter. He did not immediately recognise me: but when I mentioned my name, he at once knew who I was—and with every appearance of a bustling politeness, requested me to walk into his parlour. This opened from the shop; and I accordingly followed him thither. He was a widower—without any children, I believe; and I thus found myself alone with him. Having requested me to be seated, and offering me some refreshment—which I declined—he said in a

condoling voice, "S, you have lost poor Miss Maitland? Ah! the last time I saw the young lady I thought she was not long for this world. Poor thing! do tell me how the closing scene was passed."

"I beseech you, Mr. Armstrong," I said, "not to question me on the subject. It is much too painful!"—and for some minutes I was unable to utter another word on account of my re-awakened grief. At length I went on to observe, "I believe the last time you did see poor Miss Maitland, was on the occasion when you attended with Mr. Wenlock and Mr. Hunter to attest her will?"

"I think it was," replied Mr. Armstrong: "yes—I am sure it was. Poor young lady! I remember that in her will she spoke of you in the kindest terms, and made you a very handsome bequest."

"Would you have the goodness, Mr. Armstrong, to tell me," I said, "whether you perfectly well recollect the particulars of that will: for I presume, as a matter of course, you heard it read over before you signed it?"

"These kind of things," he answered, "do not dwell particularly in my mind: but as far as I can remember—there were some few legacies of comparative small amounts, and the bulk of the property was left to the young lady's cousin—a Mr. Maitland—But I forget his Christian name:"—then after a few instants' reflection, he exclaimed, "Theobald!—Ah, that was it! But why do you ask these questions? are you dissatisfied?"

"Oh! personally, not at all, Mr. Armstrong," I ejaculated: "for heaven's sake do not impute such selfishness to me. I am quite incapable of it."

"I should have thought so, from all I have heard of you," he remarked. "But how is it then—"

"You must really excuse me," I said, interrupting him, "if I do not remain to converse any longer: but I am anxious to get back to the hotel where I am staying. I thank you for the information you have given me, as well as for the polite readiness with which it has been afforded:"—and I took my leave of Mr. Armstrong in the firm conviction that he was an honest straightforward man, incapable of becoming a party to any fraud.

But with this impression on my mind, I was only more and more bewildered at the aspect of the entire affair. Indeed, I knew not what to think. Perhaps Mr. Hunter's abrupt departure was perfectly legitimate after all, and it was merely my fancy which had invested it with suspicion? But if the will were genuine, how could so singular and abrupt a change in Miss Maitland's sentiments with regard to her cousin Theobald, be accounted for? Was it that her mind was enfeebled and attenuated at the time, and therefore susceptible of any eccentric suggestions of her own fevered fancy—or of any undue influence which might have been brought, secretly and insidiously, to bear upon it? If the will which I had that day heard read, was the real one, its principal proviso could only be explained by one of the alternatives which I have just recorded—or perhaps by the blending of them both.

Such were my reflections as I proceeded towards the house where I had dwelt with Miss Maitland: for being in the neighbourhood and so close to it, I thought it would be unkind towards the servants

there not to call and see them. But as I was approaching the gate of the front garden, I caught sight of Mr. Theobald Maitland, walking within the enclosure in company with two other gentlemen. They were smoking cigars; and as I stood still for a few instants, I heard them all three suddenly burst forth into a boisterous peal of mirth. I hurried away, shocked at the heartlessness of Theobald Maitland in thus making the abode of his cousin, so lately deceased, the scene of such uproarious merriment; and as it was clear that he had taken up his residence there, I did not choose to risk insult at his hands by calling. He did not perceive my presence close by; and I hurried away to regain the hackney-coach which had brought me from the hotel, and which I had left waiting for me where I had first alighted. On reaching the hotel, I explained everything that had taken place to Mr. and Mrs. Kingston; and for a few minutes they both appeared as thoroughly bewildered as myself when they learnt the straightforward manner in which Mr. Armstrong had met my queries.

"Nevertheless," said the Squire, after a long silence, during which he reflected profoundly, "I still hold to the same conviction, that there is something wrong. I am very much afraid that the abrupt departure of this Charles Hunter is not so legitimate as you, Mary, have suggested it may be. As for Armstrong, he may be either a deep designing knave, or the unconscious tool of unprincipled men. It is a mystery—a profound mystery: but depend upon it, it shall be fathomed. No doubt the legacies which appear to be bequeathed to you two, were inserted in the will, if it be really a forged one, for the purpose of giving it a certain colour of legitimacy and of throwing dust in our eyes. Theobald Maitland could well afford to dispense with a couple of thousand pounds in order to make himself all the more sure, as he thought, of pocketing the great bulk. It is an unpleasant business: indeed I feel it to be a most disagreeable and even revolting reflection, that poor Laura's name should thus have to be bandied about in attorneys' offices, and perhaps dragged into a law-court. But if in the long run it should be incontestably proven that this will is a genuine one, I shall be enabled to satisfy my own conscience that I was only performing my duty towards the deceased in disputing it: whereas, if it should prove false, it will be a subject of satisfaction—even of rejoicing, that I took such a step. To-morrow I will call again upon Mr. Longman, tell him what we have learnt this evening, and put matters in such a train that we may lose no time in returning to Walmer. You two can go in the morning and call upon Mrs. Summerly as well as Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, who will be no doubt anxious to see you, Mary. And, by the bye," added the Squire, "you must invite your brother, Mary, to dine with us here to-morrow: for the day after we shall leave London."

CHAPTER CXL.

MR. LAPWING.

ACCORDING to the arrangements thus suggested by the Squire, I wrote to William, whom I was of course most anxious to see, but to whom I had not

sent any communication immediately on our arrival in London, because I had foreseen that my time would be at first so fully occupied, and I did not choose to encroach upon his by making him call at the hotel without the certainty of finding me there. I also wrote to Jane at Langham Hall in Buckinghamshire; and these letters being despatched to the post, I proceeded with Mrs. Kingston at about eleven o'clock to Sunbeam Villa. But we were both smitten with apprehension when we perceived that the shutters were closed in the ground-floor rooms, and the blinds drawn down in the upper ones, as if death were in the house. Our fears on behalf of Mrs. Summerly or the Crawfords were however soon set at rest, when Goldworthy, making his appearance, informed us that it was Mr. Trevanion who was dead, he having expired on the previous day at the Hall in Essex, after a brief illness of only a few hours. It appeared that Mr. and Mrs. Crawford were staying with him at the time; and that Sybilla was not absent from her father's side in his last moments. Mrs. Summerly had repaired thither on the previous evening, a messenger having been despatched to her immediately it was found that Mr. Trevanion was at the point of death. Both Mrs. Kingston and I bade Goldworthy say everything kind on our part to Mrs. Summerly when she should return; and I intimated my intention of writing a letter of condolence to Mrs. Crawford. We returned to the hotel; and soon afterwards the Squire joined us. He said that Mr. Longman would prosecute the affair with as much speed as law-proceedings would allow, or as the tactics of our opponents would afford an opportunity of doing. He had decided upon adopting some means to ascertain the whereabouts of Charles Hunter: but he had expressed his opinion that the case would prove a very difficult one. He had likewise said that it would be highly desirable for me to remain a little while longer in London, if I could make it convenient; because, inasmuch as I was acquainted with the Hunters, and had likewise had that interview with Mr. Armstrong, it would be expedient for me to be upon the spot in the eventuality of the former being discovered, or should it be necessary to hold any farther communication with the latter. Besides, as I was living with Miss Maitland at the time she made her will, I could in case of need depose to any circumstances that having at all come to my knowledge, and though at present apparently unimportant, might seem to bear upon the case. Mrs. Kingston did not like leaving me behind in London; and the Squire, with his usual hearty frankness, assured me that he would not have proposed such a course, had not the attorney represented it as necessary. For my own part I would much sooner that the entire proceedings relative to the will should be at once abandoned, inasmuch as it was partially on my account that they were being adopted: but as they were once entered upon, and the Kingstons were so resolute in proceeding with them, I felt it my bounden duty to render all possible assistance. I therefore declared my readiness to remain in London,—adding that I thought it most probable I should obtain comfortable and respectable lodgings at the house of a kind-hearted woman with whom I was acquainted. Mrs. Kingston asked me whom I meant; and I mentioned Mrs. Chaplin in Conduit Street.

"Then, my dear Tom," she said, "you and I will take a walk out together, as I wish to make a few purchases; and we will call upon this Mrs. Chaplin, so as to assure ourselves that Mary can not only be accommodated, but that she will be comfortable."

The Squire and his wife accordingly issued forth together. I had understood full well Mrs. Kingston's purpose in leaving me alone in our sitting-room at the hotel; and I entirely appreciated the delicate manner in which she thus afforded me an opportunity to receive the expected visit from Eustace Quentin. The appointed hour came—and my heart fluttered more perhaps than it ought, after the resolve I had taken to regard him only in the light of a friend, and to beseech him to look upon me in a similar manner. But minute after minute passed away, and I was rather surprised that he was not exactly punctual: half-an-hour elapsed—time thus wore on—and I felt nervously anxious. But Eustace came not. Three o'clock was the appointed hour—it was now five, and he had not made his appearance. He would not therefore come at all!—of this I felt persuaded. But wherefore? Had he gone out of town? had he removed to other lodgings? or had anything happened to him? I was very uneasy, but endeavoured to tranquillize myself as much as possible by the supposition that through some cause which would no doubt be simply and satisfactorily explained, he had not received my letter.

Mr. and Mrs. Kingston came back, and informed me that Mrs. Chaplin having apartments vacant, they had secured them for me—that the worthy woman was delighted at the idea of having me as a lodger—and that she had promised to make me as comfortable as possible. I had only just time to whisper to Mrs. Kingston that Eustace had not been, when my brother William, who was to dine with us, made his appearance. We were much rejoiced to see each other; and he experienced the kindest welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Kingston. He was both surprised and pleased to hear that I intended to remain for the present in London; and assured me that he was quite certain Mr. Appleton would be very angry that I did not make his house my home. But I answered that it would be rather too much to tax that gentleman's kindness with the presence of both brother and sister,—adding that I knew full well I should be certain of finding a home at Sunbeam Villa on Mrs. Summerly's return from Essex; but that, all things considered, it would be better for me to stay at Mrs. Chaplin's, her house being near enough to Mr. Longman's for me to be fetched at the shortest notice in case of emergency. But if I had no other reasons for staying at Mrs. Chaplin's, William himself furnished me with one in the course of the evening. For as the Squire and his wife considerably allowed us half-an-hour's opportunity for private conversation, I learnt from William that on the previous day he had seen Sarah riding in a carriage with a gentleman. This was in the Strand, whither some business had taken my brother at the time: he did not think that Sarah saw him—but he could be certain that it was she herself. I questioned him as to the appearance of the gentleman; but he could not give me a sufficiently definite portraiture to enable me to identify him with Mr. Octavius Lapwing. It farther appeared that William had run after the vehi-

cle in order to speak to Sarah; but it was driven away so fast that he lost sight of it; and though he took a cab to follow in the same direction, he failed to come up with it again. It being thus certain that Sarah was in London, I was glad that my own arrangements had led me to remain in the metropolis, and also that I was to be located at Mrs. Chaplin's, whose residence being at the West End, would afford me the best opportunity of renewing the search after my erring sister in those fashionable quarters where she was most likely residing. Before William took his departure that evening, I made a promise to dine on the following Sunday at Mr. Appleton's, where I knew full well I should be welcome.

On the ensuing day Mr. and Mrs. Kingston took their departure, bidding me the kindest farewells and making me promise to return to them at the Grange so soon as the will case should be decided in one way or another, and there should be no longer any necessity for me to remain in London. Mrs. Kingston was most earnest in her entreaties that I would make her husband my banker whenever I might require money; and she wished to force upon me a considerable sum before we parted: but I had three hundred pounds of my own, and therefore required not any pecuniary assistance—though my acknowledgments were not the less gratefully expressed than if I had accepted her kind offer. I cannot help here repeating that the Squire and his wife were amongst the most truly frank-hearted and liberal-minded people I had ever known; and when they were anxious to perform a kind act, they invariably went about it in a manner so generous and at the same time so delicate that it doubled the value of the boon.

They took their departure; and I removed to Mrs. Chaplin's, where I was cordially welcomed by that good woman. I found that the Kingstons had taken the first floor for me, consisting of a drawing-room, parlour, and bed-chamber; and they had paid the rent for a term of three months. I remained at home the whole of that day, and I will not hesitate to confess the reason. I thought it most probable—indeed certain, that Eustace Quentin would call, or at least that I should receive a letter from him: for I had left my address at the hotel, so that any correspondence directed thither might be forwarded to my new abode. I employed myself chiefly in writing some letters. For here I may observe that on three or four occasions, when in Italy, I had written to Barbauld Azetha in St. Giles's, but had received no answer. I now wrote again, that when she revisited the metropolis she might know where to find me. I will likewise avail myself of this opportunity to state that I had never ceased to correspond with many of my old friends—such as the Percivals in Derbyshire, and Mrs. Cleveland (Miss Temple that was) in Hampshire. I always received good accounts of the prosperity of the Percivals, and the most affectionate letters from Selina, with an occasional note inside from Mrs. Antrobus. The Clelands, after their marriage, had settled in Winchester,—near which city, as the reader will remember, Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus dwelt.

My letter-writing occupied me a considerable portion of that day; but from three to five o'clock I was too much a prey to nervous suspense to

settle myself to anything. I was expecting Eustace. He came not—neither did any communication from him, verbal or written; and I began seriously to apprehend that some evil had befallen him. Vainly did I say to myself that I was foolish to entertain such fears; for that the simplest and most probable solution of the mystery was that he had gone out of town—perhaps to Liverpool, where dwelt the shipowners to whom he was so deeply indebted: vainly, I say, did I endeavour to reason myself out of my alarms—I could not banish them from my mind—they clung to me with the tenacity of a presentiment. The day passed; and I retired to my bed-chamber with a heart cruelly tortured and a thousand misgivings floating in my brain respecting Eustace. Indeed, I resolved to despatch a messenger next day to his lodgings to inquire if he were out of town; for I could not endure the suspense much longer.

Soon after breakfast in the morning I was on the point of ringing for the servant to procure me a messenger, when Mrs. Chaplin came up to the parlour with a note from Mr. Longman the solicitor. It was to inform me that he had vainly endeavoured on the preceding day to discover, by means of a stratagem practised towards Mr. Wenlock, the whereabouts of Charles Hunter; and that he had therefore inserted an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper, which I should find in this day's impression of that journal. He explained that he had sent one of his clerks, who was a very intelligent person, to Mr. Wenlock to pretend to treat for Mr. Hunter's house, and to endeavour to discover the latter's present abode, by feigning to have certain inquiries to put respecting the premises, which could only be answered by a person who had lived in them: but Mr. Wenlock had replied that he did not then exactly know where Mr. Hunter was to be found, and that if the applicant was so very particular and scrupulous about the healthy situation of the dwelling, its freedom from damp, and so forth, he had better at once abandon all idea of taking it. Such was the substance of Mr. Longman's communication; and he requested me to enclose his letter in the next one that I might be sending to the Kingstons.

I sent out for a copy of the *Times*, and also to obtain a messenger: the newspaper was brought, and a porter was likewise procured. I sent him to make the requisite inquiries at Captain Quentin's lodgings; and when he had taken his departure, I searched the proper columns for the particular advertisement to which my attention had been directed. I soon found it. It was addressed to "Mr. Charles Hunter, late managing clerk in the office of Mr. Wenlock, solicitor," and requesting him "to communicate his present address without delay to Mr. Longman, solicitor, a matter of the utmost importance being involved." I was listlessly turning over the pages of the journal and glancing down its news-columns, when my eyes suddenly settled upon a paragraph headed, "Death of Lady Wilberton." It instantaneously struck me that in this circumstance might probably be found the cause of my disappointment in neither seeing Eustace nor hearing from him. The paragraph containing the announcement, was brief. It stated that Lady Wilberton and her son, Lord Wilberton, had recently been staying at the family-seat in Yorkshire, where

her ladyship, having caught a severe cold which settled on the lungs, expired after a few days' illness. I felt assured that notwithstanding her harsh treatment towards him, Eustace would be profoundly afflicted by his mother's death. But perhaps she had repented in her last moments of that severity? perhaps Eustace had been hastily summoned into Yorkshire to receive her dying embrace? and perhaps—But, no! I dared not give way to the wild thrill of hope which suddenly swept through me like an electric shock. Even if the mother should have relented, she had not the power to alter the dying injunctions of her late husband: for the passage especially binding upon herself, as well as every other line and syllable of those injunctions, was seared upon my memory—I recollected it well. *"I do enjoin my beloved wife, as my executrix, not to consent to any marriage which our said son Eustace Quentin shall propose to solemnize, unless his intended wife be possessed of a fortune in her own right of at least thirty thousand pounds."* Those were the words: and I saw not how Lady Wilberton could evade the injunction, even though upon her death-bed she had become inspired with the kindest wishes on behalf of her son Eustace and myself. No: I was wrong to give way to hope even for a single instant; and yet the thrill thereof was delicious while it lasted.

I was in the midst of my reflections upon this subject, when the messenger returned after an hour's absence: for it was in a street leading out of the Strand where the house was situated in which Eustace lodged.

"Captain Quentin is not at home, Miss," he said; "and he has been absent for the last two or three days. It seems he was fetched away rather hurriedly, and only just had time to have his things packed up in a portmanteau before he went. But he did not say where he was going, or how long he should be away. There are several letters waiting for him; and the landlady of the house says that he shall have them all the moment he returns or communicates with her."

I dismissed the man; and from what he had just told me, I felt convinced that I had rightly conjectured when I supposed Eustace to have been sent for in all haste to the family-seat in Yorkshire. Perhaps he would write to me at Kingston Grange?—for immediately on my return to England, I had written thence to him, and he must have had this letter several days previous to his being fetched away from London. My mind was now at all events relieved from any apprehensions concerning him; and I entertained the hope that by some means or another Lady Wilberton's death might prove beneficial to him in a pecuniary sense, enabling him to settle his liabilities. She had no doubt ample funds of her own, and might bequeath them, or any portion of them, to Eustace without the slightest violation of her husband's injunctions. Such were the calculations I made,—suffering my fancy to build up these hopes on behalf of one whom I loved as tenderly as ever, and whom I knew I could never cease to love.

In the afternoon of that day I went out for a walk, in the hope that I might catch a glimpse of Sarah. More than ever did I now long for Barbauld Azetha to return to London, that I might get her to use all her mysterious means of inquiry

and research to discover my sister's abode. But perhaps the Gipsy Queen was no longer in the land of the living? perhaps she had gone down in the footsteps of her mother to the grave? More than eighteen months had elapsed since the revelations of Mad Tommy on his death-bed had rendered me so anxious to see the Gipsy Queen, that I might make one more effort with her to clear up the mystery which hung around my father's fate; and during those eighteen months my letters had remained unanswered—which I felt assured would not be the case, if Barbauld Azetha had during that interval revisited her house in St. Giles's. What, then, had become of her? and if she were alive, what meant this long absence?

I was asking myself these questions as I was proceeding down Bond Street, when my attention was suddenly drawn to a crowd gathered around a close carriage, drawn by one horse, and the coachman belonging to which was in a very handsome livery. There was just room enough on the pavement for me to pass; and I was passing accordingly, when I suddenly caught a glimpse of the well-known countenance of Mr. Lapwing. But that was not all: he was in the custody of two policemen, who were ordering the crowd to make way that they might lead him off. He looked dreadfully agitated—indeed so excited and bewildered that his feelings rose even above shame at the ignominy of his position. Convinced that this was his equipage, and in the belief that Sarah might be inside,—for I could not see into the vehicle on account of the intervening crowd,—I sped round, off the pavement, to the other side, where there was no such obstruction: but at that very instant the carriage dashed rapidly away, either in obedience to some intimation from Mr. Lapwing himself, or from another person inside—perhaps Sarah. It was useless for me to think of running after it—though such was my first impulse: and I looked anxiously around in search of a street-cab, if one should be near. But there was none; and by this time the equipage had disappeared from my view. A thought struck me; and in obedience thereto I followed, at a distance, the officers who had Mr. Lapwing in their custody. Several of the crowd followed likewise: but I kept in their rear. The prisoner was taken to the nearest station-house; and those whom curiosity had led on his track, remained conversing together in the street for some time. I continued hovering at a distance for nearly half-an-hour, not liking to accost any one of the crowd, nor yet to penetrate into the police-station before so many beholders—though this latter was my intention when I had followed thither. At length mustering up my courage, I passed into the station-house; and accosting one of the policemen whom I beheld lounging about, I asked if there was a young female in the carriage at the time of the prisoner's arrest? The constable was a very civil man, and answered me respectfully in the affirmative. I gave a hurried description of Sarah; and he replied that it corresponded with "Mr. Lapwing's lady," as he called her. Then I asked if he were acquainted with their address.

"No, Miss—that I ain't," was the constable's response. "He has been wanted any time for these last six weeks: but we didn't know where to lay our hand upon him; and it was only by an accident like,

that we tumbled down upon him just now and took him up, as you see."

"And what is his offence?" I asked, with a shudder at the idea of my sister having been the companion of felons such as Lapwing and Tolle-mache.

"Getting a lot of watches, and chains, and rings, and what not, and then putting them all up the flue."

"Up where?" I asked, not comprehending the explanation, but having a vague idea that the jewellery had been hidden in a chimney.

"At the pawnbroker's, Miss," rejoined the constable. "There's a many other things that will turn up agin him; and he's safe to get two years of it, even if he doesn't find his-self sent across the water at the Government expense."

"What can I do to ascertain where he has been living? I much desire to see that young person who was in the carriage just now."

"I don't think it will be any use," said the constable, "for me to go and ask the prisoner where he lives—'cause why, he would suspect there was some plant in it. I know very well he's changed his lodgings three or four times during the last two months; 'cause why, when once he gets a good haul, such as them watches and things, sent home from a jeweller's, he mizzles away to another place. He must have the impudence of Old Nick to venture down Bond Street in the broad day-light. It's a great pity—for he's well connected: but his family has thrown him off, and his aunt or grandmother—I don't know which—old Lady Bagshot—died t'other day, and didn't leave him enough in her will to buy him a rope to hang himself."

I was not lingering in the station-house to listen to these particulars: but because I was revolving an idea in my mind. It had occurred to me that if I were to send Mr. Lapwing a little note into his cell, beseeching him to write back word where I could see my sister, he might furnish me the address of his last abode—especially if, having any regard for her, he thought that she might require succour or consolation under existing circumstances. But then it struck me that if I did this, the constable who must be the bearer of my note, would see the reply; and perhaps on ascertaining the address, he would proceed to make a search there—and heaven only knew how my sister might become implicated in Lapwing's nefarious transactions. So I decided upon abandoning that idea, and trusting to some other means to discover her residence.

"You see, Miss," resumed the constable, who thought that I was interested in his explanations, "tradesmen is apt to be thrown off their guard when a swell carriage drives up to their door. They don't give themselves time to reflect that perhaps the carriage don't belong after all to them as rides in it—but is only let out,—horses, livery-servant, and all."

I cut the conversation short by giving the constable half-a-crown; and thanking him for his civility, took my departure, sorrowing profoundly at the shocking career which my sister Sarah was pursuing. I was retracing my way back to Conduit Street, when I suddenly caught sight of the carriage which I had seen in Bond Street, and which I at once recognized to be that hired by Mr. Lapwing. It was coming along at a slow pace, and was just turning into a stable-yard, when I beckoned the

coachman to stop. He did so; and leaping down from the box, touched his hat, while he awaited what I had to say. I gave him some money; and in answer to my questions speedily learnt the information that I sought.

My sister was living at a house in May Fair. This was at no great distance; and I resolved to proceed thither at once. I reflected as I went along that if ever there were a moment when it might be possible to make an impression upon her, it must be when she was under the influence of such a scene as that which had just occurred, and when the consequences of a guilty career were so strikingly brought home to her. Thus, not without a hope that I might yet succeed in conducting the crring girl back into the paths of repentance—or at all events in rescuing her from those of depravity which she was pursuing—I hurried my steps towards May Fair. The house was reached: I knocked at the door, and a female-servant answered the summons. I inquired if Mrs. Lapwing were at home?—for I of course concluded that such was the name by which my sister passed. Nor was I mistaken: for the servant at once replied in the affirmative, and conducted me up-stairs to the first floor. She was very civil and respectful; and I therefore concluded that the occurrence to Mr. Lapwing was unknown to the people of the house. Perhaps, on the way home, Sarah had enjined or bribed the coachman of the vehicle not to mention it.

On reaching the landing I heard sounds of merry laughter in male voices, but with a female one chiming in, issuing from a room on that floor. It certainly struck me that the female voice was Sarah's: but I could scarcely bring myself to believe that this was possible after what had occurred in Bond Street but little more than an hour back. However, I had not much time for reflection: for the servant, after asking my name, flung open the door of that very room whence the sounds of mirth came forth—and I beheld a scene which shocked as much as it surprised me. Sarah was half-reclining upon a sofa, with a champagne-glass in her hand. Two gentlemen—one quite young, the other of middle age, and both dressed in the extreme of fashion—were loling on chairs: a third, not above eighteen, but with a wretchedly dissipated appearance, was standing up waving his empty champagne-glass over his head. He was evidently telling some anecdote—"a capital joke," no doubt—which the sudden opening of the door cut short. The room was very handsomely furnished; and upon the table were three or four champagne bottles and several glasses.

The door was so situated that the instant it was thrown open, my eyes embraced at a glance the whole scene I have just described—though I myself stopped short on the threshold. Sarah gave a sort of start at the mention of my name by the servant: but quickly recovering her composure, she said in a languid, indolent manner, "Ah, Mary! is that you? Come in, if you like—or else call to-morrow, when I shall be alone."

"What! is this your sister, most lovely Sarah?" asked the elderly gentleman, putting up an eyeglass and staring at me very rudely: "this the famous Mary Price, of whom Lapwing was talking to us the other day when he was so jolly tipsy that he let out who your sister was?"

"Sarah," I said, "I wish to speak to you for a moment—only one moment!"

"Well then, if you must, I suppose you will have your way," she exclaimed pettishly: and springing up from the sofa, she observed with a smile to the gentlemen, "I will be with you again in a minute."

"Oh, but this is not fair!" cried the youngest one—the flourisher of the champagne-glass. "You must not leave us! And besides, we shall be delighted to have your sister's company."

But Sarah had already joined me at the door, from the threshold of which I had recoiled after having mustered up all my courage to beg that she would come forth;—and entering a back room, she said snappishly, "Come in here."

It was a smaller apartment into which I now followed her, and most probably served as a dining-room. Closing the door, and without making the slightest overture to embrace me—nor even asking me to sit down—but treating me, in short, with more than indifference, for it was absolutely an insolent impatience,—she said, "Now then, be quick and tell me what brings you here."

I was so shocked at this heartless conduct on her part, that I sank upon a chair and burst into tears.

"Oh, this is so like you!" exclaimed Sarah. "But who are you in mourning for?" she asked, with a strange abruptness.

"I have been in mourning, Sarah, for some time," was my response, as I hastily wiped my eyes and exercised a command over my feelings; "and you ought to have been in mourning likewise. Robert is dead."

"Ah, poor Robert!"—and for a moment she seemed touched: but not a tear trickled down her cheeks.

"Yes—Robert is no more," I continued: "he has been dead upwards of two years. But now I am in mourning for a very dear friend of mine—a young lady—"

"What handsome mourning!" observed Sarah, surveying me as if she were calculating how much my dress had cost a yard, or what was the price of my bonnet. "But Robert is gone, you say—and I knew nothing of it."

"How could you know it, Sarah?" I asked, "since you never communicate with any of us? You seem to forget that you have a brother and two sisters in the world."

"What's the use of my letting you know where I am, or what I am doing? Whenever you come to me, it is only to scold and make yourself disagreeable."

"Would to heaven, I had any reason to wear an agreeable countenance when I do come to you! Now, Sarah," I went on to say, "I know what has happened—I was present in Bond Street—"

"Ah!" she ejaculated, the colour mounting to her cheeks: and for a few moments she was lost in confusion. "But you didn't mention anything about it to the people of the house?"

"No, Sarah: I did not wish to expose you more than you expose yourself."

"But how did you find out where I live?" she demanded abruptly.

"I need make no mystery of it. I recognized the carriage, and I learnt your address from the coach-

man. I came hither at once—thinking perhaps that after what had occurred in Bond Street you might need some consolation—"

"Ah, well—I was dreadfully vexed," interrupted Sarah: "but on coming home, I found those three capital fellows waiting our return; and so I made an excuse to account for Lapwing's absence, and sat down to enjoy myself."

"And you call that dreadful orgie *enjoyment*, Sarah?" I said: and I could not prevent my voice from conveying the bitterness of reproach.

"Ah! you are going to lecture me again," she cried, her eyes flashing fire: "but I do not mean to put up with it. Once for all, Mary—"

"Once for all, Sarah," I exclaimed, firmly and resolutely, "you shall listen to me. Depend upon it, this is the last time I will ever seek you of my own accord—not but that I would fly to you if you sent for me," I added, instantaneously repenting of my former remark. "Yes, my poor sister—I would give worlds, did I possess them, to draw you away from the path which you are pursuing. Will you come and live with me, Sarah? will you promise to be steady and to reform? I am a little better off in the world than I was—I have met many kind friends—I possess them now—and I have no fear for the future. O Sarah, I see that you are touched by what I am saying! Do—for heaven's sake—I conjure you—yield to my wishes! Follow my advice, and you may yet look forward to real happiness in this world. For there may be happiness where there is true repentance! Sarah, what do you say? will you come with me? Oh, come—come—pray, come!"

She was indeed moved: her countenance had become pensive as I was speaking. I accosted her and took her hand, which she left lingering in my own. On thus beholding her near, I saw that she was much changed since last we met, more than two years back. The traces of an irregular life—I feared, even of dissipation in respect to exciting wines—were already upon that young countenance: for she was not yet twenty years of age. The cheeks too were thin: there were blue marks under the eyes; and altogether the bloom of her beauty had begun to fade sadly—sadly!

"I adjure you, Sarah," I continued, infinitely pained by this result of the near but rapid survey which I took of her, "to listen to my words. You know that Robert led an irregular life—but you have yet to learn that he was indebted to charity for the bed upon which he breathed his last. But, Oh! thank heaven, he was penitent—and he said to me in his latest moments that I had been a good sister to him—and he spoke hopefully also of William and of Jane. But, alas! from that death-bed, Sarah, did he bid me bear unto you a solemn warning to amend and repent! And in the bitterness of his remorse he said that if he had done his duty to you as a brother, you would not have gone astray!"

"Oh, Mary! don't talk to me in this manner," cried Sarah, with a passionate outburst of grief. "It drives me mad—it drives me mad!"—and as she wrung her hands, she shook herself with all her characteristic vehemence, as if she were a spoiled child.

"Yes—but it is my duty, Sarah," I continued, again hastily wiping away the tears that were streaming down my cheeks, "to convey to you that solemn warning which from his death-bed Robert

sent! Oh! reflect, Sarah, upon the dreadful consequences of an evil course of life. Where is Mr. Lapwing? In a dungeon—branded with felony—to be placed to-morrow at the bar of justice. Where is Captain Tollemache?"

"Ah!" she suddenly ejaculated: and dashing away her own tears, she gazed upon me in surprise. "Has anything happened to him? I have not heard of it. And that clergyman's daughter—Helen Palmer——"

"Captain Tollemache," I answered solemnly, "is a convicted forger—now wearing the chain of a galley-slave in France; and Helen Palmer perished as a wretched suicide in the Seine!"

Sarah was so shocked that she was deprived of the power of utterance. She even staggered back as if struck with a sudden blow; and she gazed upon me in dismayed bewilderment.

"Sarah—dear Sarah," I said, in the most earnest and entreating manner, "will you not do as I ask you? will you not make your sister your future companion? I offer you a home, with every comfort: I will love and cherish you. Never from my lips shall you hear a syllable of reproach for the past—nothing but what will tend to strengthen your better resolves for the future. Will you not come with me? Yes—you will come at once! The sooner you leave this house, the sooner will the first step in the right direction be taken. Come with me, my dear sister—come! Good heavens, you hesitate even now—after all I have told you! Is Robert's death-bed warning to be neglected? is the terrible example of the unfortunate Helen Palmer to be disregarded? and would you seek the companionship of another Tollemache, or another felon such as he who has been torn from you to-day? To-morrow his guilt will be known throughout London. Will those men who have been quaffing champagne with you in the adjoining room, set foot any more in your presence when they learn what has happened? O Sarah, again and again do I conjure you, ere it be too late, to follow the counsel I give! Save yourself—save yourself—be saved by me!"

My sister was evidently enduring great anguish and agitation as I thus addressed her. An immense struggle was taking place within her. Callous and cold-hearted though she were, she was nevertheless moved by the warnings and the examples which like a succession of severe blows had been presented to her contemplation during the last few minutes. I thought that it would require but another word to bend her completely to my purpose and startle her away from the path of error: and this word I hastened to speak.

"Sarah," I asked, in the most solemn and impressive manner, "if you pursue this career, in what must it end?"

"Ah! it is that thought," she cried, in another paroxysm of vehemence, and with an expression of anguish, as ineffable as it was transitory, sweeping over her countenance,—"it is that thought which at times has almost driven me mad!—it is that thought which makes wine so welcome! For do you know, Mary, that I hate the taste of wine?—and yet I drink it often—often! I crave it—I long for it! It stupifies some feelings and exhilarates others—it is a narcotic for care and an impulse to wild reckless joy!"

"Sarah, Sarah—for heaven's sake speak not thus!" I said, shocked at her language and her manner. "Come with me, my dear sister—come with me, I implore you!"

"No, no—it cannot be," she replied quickly. "Yet I thank you, Mary—I do really thank you this time; and I feel that I have been hard-hearted towards you. But my destiny is fixed. Oh! for me to settle down into a quiet life—to renounce all pursuits of gaiety—No, no—it is impossible! Why, the adulation of men—their idle tittle-tattle—their frivolous nothings—their very impertinences and flippancies,—all these are as necessary to me as the air I breathe. You see, Mary, that I comprehend full well my own disposition. Oh, I have gained infinitely in experience since last you and I met! Well do I understand myself—I know that I can only exist in this whirl of dissipation and pleasure. *A short life and a merry one*—that is my maxim—not only my maxim, but the prophetic summing up of my history!"

If I had been shocked on more occasions than one during the best part of an hour which had thus elapsed since I first entered this house where my sister dwelt, I was now absolutely confounded by the speech which she addressed to me. Its confessions were dreadful: and yet there was a frightful interest in the delineation of character which the unfortunate girl drew in respect to herself. It was a picture vividly and strikingly drawn—but appalling in its effect: it was as the glare of the lightning, brilliantly terrible, but which sends a shock through the entire form.

"Sarah—dear Sarah," I said, so soon as I could recover the power of speech: "for heaven's sake, talk not in this wild manner! Oh, what would you have me think? that my own sister is utterly lost!—lost beyond redemption! Such an idea is sufficient to drive me mad: it will embitter all my days! Oh! Sarah, Sarah—are there no memories of earlier and other times—no images of perished and departed ones, by which I could conjure you to invoke all good angels to your aid, and fling off the thrall-dom of the powers of evil?"

"Mary, we must talk no more upon the subject," responded Sarah, who, while I was speaking, had become thoughtful again, and from whose countenance the animation of her excited feelings had passed away, leaving it paler than it was before. "What you have suggested—what you have proposed—cannot be! I tell you again that it is my destiny to continue as I am—a destiny from which I cannot escape. I am not now speaking rashly or heedlessly: I am speaking seriously and deliberately—any further remonstrance on your part will only increase the pain we both experience."

I was about to persevere in my entreaties and remonstrances notwithstanding what she had just said, when the door opened suddenly, and the three gentlemen whom we had left in the drawing-room, made their appearance. At the first moment Sarah's eyes flashed with indignation at their intrusion: but this anger on her part was only evanescent; and when she perceived that each held a brimming champagne-glass in his hand, and that their looks as well as the words they at once addressed to her were fraught with a wild and reckless hilarity, her countenance lighted up with smiles. But my heart sank into the depths of despair: I saw that she was lost.



"We can endure your absence no longer," said one of the gentlemen; "and therefore have we come to fetch you."

"It is cruel—most cruel," quickly exclaimed the second, "to interrupt the gaiety in which we were revelling."

"And for my part," cried the third—the very young gentleman who was flourishing his glass and telling the anecdote at the moment my name was first announced,—*"I felt as if darkness had fallen upon the scene when you, beautiful creature, had vanished thence!"*

I could not repress a look of mingled abhorrence and disgust as I flung my eyes upon these three dissipated persons; and a pang shot through my heart at the idea of leaving Sarah in such companionship. I turned my eyes entreatingly and imploringly upon her; she shook her head with a sort of hysterical quickness, and then instantane-

ously assuming a cheerful tone, she said, "I will join you in a minute. One single minute, and I will be with you."

"No, no," they all three exclaimed; "we cannot consent to abandon another minute of your sweet society."

"Gentlemen," I said, "she is my sister—we have private matters to converse upon——"

"But with all possible respect," interrupted the youngest of the three, "we cannot resign the society of our lovely friend, even to her own sister. I admit that we are selfish—awfully, terribly, abominably selfish: but who would not be so, when the society we are asked to abandon is so charming—so exquisitely delightful?"

"Go, dearest Mary—go!" hastily whispered Sarah, catching me by the hand and pressing it with a nervous spasmodic violence: "go now—this is no company for you!"

"Nor for you, Sarah," I answered, also in a low voice: for I was fearful of provoking insult on the part of those three gentlemen.

"Where are you living?" asked Sarah. "I will write to you soon—very soon——"

I whispered my address, and perceiving how useless it was to offer any farther entreaty or remonstrance, I hurried out of the room. On my way back to Conduit Street, I said to myself a hundred times, and in the soul's secret voice of indescribable anguish, "Is it not possible to save her? is it not possible to save her?"

That same evening I received a note from my erring sister. It was brief, yet far more affectionate in its terms than her mode of addressing me was wont to be: but the announcement it contained filled my heart with despair. She was on the point of leaving London at the moment she penned it; and by the time I received that missive, she would already be some miles away. Alas! I comprehended but too well that she had accepted the protection of one of the three *routés* whom I had seen at her lodgings,—and I also felt assured that it was the youngest of those competitors for her smiles, that had succeeded in carrying off the prize.

CHAPTER CXLI.

EUSTACE QUENTIN'S LETTER.

ON the Sunday, according to previous arrangement, I repaired to Mr. Appleton's house in the City, and was most kindly received by that gentleman. I saw the orphan children of his late niece whose heart was broken by the cruelty of the false Count de Montville: the elder was a boy, now about ten years old—the younger, a girl, was about seven. They were very nice children,—excellently trained by a most respectable governess engaged by their kind relative for the purpose; and I was truly rejoiced to see them. William and I took a walk out together; and I told him all that had occurred in respect to Sarah. He was much afflicted: but still he entertained some little hope that as she had shown such a remarkable appreciation of her position, her ultimate rescue from a career of evil was not improbable. From Mr. Appleton I learnt that Mrs. Sumnerly purposed to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford for some weeks at the mansion in Essex; and he likewise informed me that in consequence of the pecuniary arrangements he had effected on behalf of the late Mr. Trevanion, the estate, which had now devolved upon the Crawfords, would soon be cleared of all encumbrances.

On the following day I received letters from Mrs. Sumnerly and Sybilla, condoling with me on the loss of Miss Matland, and inviting me to pay them a visit in Essex. Mrs. Sumnerly assured me that Sunbeam Villa was as entirely at my service as a residence if I chose to make it my home; and that if I would take up my quarters there, she would shorten her stay at Trevanion Hall in order to keep me company at her own house. I lost no time in answering these kind letters, explaining the nature of the business which kept me in London and which induced me to occupy a lodging at no very great distance from the solicitor's. I promised Sybilla to avail myself of her invitation as soon as

circumstances would permit. From my sister Jane and the Countess of Chilstone I likewise received letters. Her ladyship sent me a pressing invitation to visit them in Buckinghamshire; and to her did I send a reply similar to that already forwarded to Mrs. Crawford. I also received letters from the Kingstons: but there was no enclosure, as I had expected, from Eustace Quentin. He had not therefore written to me at the Grange to announce his mother's death: the letter I had sent to him at his lodgings still continued unanswered. But still I did not feel uneasy; because I concluded that he was still in Yorkshire to attend the funeral, and that perhaps he had no means of sending letters to the post without their passing through the hands of the domestics, and he did not choose, when death was in the house, to incur the chance of angry words with his brother who might learn with whom he corresponded. But when another week had passed,—and I knew that the funeral must be over,—no letter came, either re-directed from the Grange, or direct from any other place, I did begin to grow uneasy: I was fearful that something might have happened to Eustace. At length all doubt was set at rest by a note which I received, and which at once destroyed all the conjectures I had built up in respect to the cause of his absence and his silence. This note ran as follows:—

"King's Bench Prison, July 29th, 1834.

"I know, dearest Mary, how deeply you will be shocked when you read the address at the head of this letter. My pecuniary embarrassments have brought me hither. I was arrested at my lodgings a fortnight back—just two days previously to the date which your note bore. Not wishing to create a scandal at the house, I did not suffer the inmates to know who the persons were that came to fetch me away. This calamity was almost immediately followed by the receipt of the intelligence of my poor mother's death. I naturally supposed that my brother would instruct his solicitor to adopt prompt measures to effect my release, so that I might follow the remains of my parent to the tomb. But this was not done: no such kind regard was paid to my feelings. The letters I received from Ferdinand were cold and laconic—alas, alas! that I should have to say so of my own brother, and under such painful circumstances! Then I addressed letters of the most earnest entreaty to those who had placed me here—but all without effect; and my mother's remains have been consigned to the grave while I was held captive in a debtors' gaol! I did not at once write to you, dear Mary, because I thought that if I should regain my liberty soon, you need never be afflicted by knowing that I had passed through this painful ordeal. And the same hope of recovering my freedom prevented me from exciting unpleasant and derogatory suspicions at my lodgings, by sending a messenger thither for any letters that might be waiting for me. Yesterday, however, when I found that I had no hope of emancipation, I did send to my late residence, and amongst other letters brought back to me, was your's. Oh, how joyous was it to behold your dear hand-writing again!—but the next minute how great was my sorrow when I wondered to myself what you must have thought on finding that I did not hasten to visit you at the hotel! what you must have thought too at my continued absence and silence! Until your note came, I believed you to be still at Kingston Grange in Kent; and I had made up my mind to write to you at once and explain the sad position to which I am reduced. Oh! dearest Mary, how will you receive this intelligence? It is the bitterest of my pangs to be compelled to impart it. But I dare no longer withhold the truth: I fear lest you should receive the information from some other quarter or through some other channel, and the shock might be greater than even when thus conveyed direct from my-

self. But profoundly though I am afflicted, for many, many reasons,—afflicted at my mother's loss—afflicted at my brother's cruelty—afflicted likewise on account of this sorrow which I know full well your generous heart will experience—yet think not, dear Mary, that I am abandoning myself to utter despair. It is true that my position is a sad one,—true that I see no immediate issue from this cruel dilemma: but I have faith in heaven, and my conscience taxes me not with offences that deserve a chastisement from which there is to be no relief.

"I do not ask you to come and see me here: it is no place for you to set foot in. No, Mary—you must not come. But you can write to me; and it will be a solace unspeakable every time I behold your handwriting. God bless you, dearest Mary! and whatever be the way I ought under existing circumstances to subscribe myself, I cannot conclude otherwise than with the assurance that I am

"Ever your affectionately devoted
"EUSTACE."

The shock which I had received the moment my looks settled on the ominous words indicating the place whence the letter came, was almost overwhelming. The paper, as I read its contents, became speedily saturated with the tears that fell upon it in torrents. The violence of my grief continued for some minutes after I had finished the perusal; and in the frenzy of my thoughts my first impulse was to fly to the prison to console the unfortunate and well-beloved captive. But suddenly I was smitten with a sense of the duty which I had now to perform. My affliction was calmed all in a moment: methought I beheld the certain prospect of Captain Quentin's speedy release, to be accomplished by the project which had occurred to me; and the wildness of my grief was even succeeded by a profound and serene joy.

It was about mid-day that I had received the letter: I lost no time in dressing myself to go out, and bent my way to Piccadilly. On reaching Wilberton House, I perceived upon the front, between the upper windows, the enormous emblazoned hatchment which denoted that death had lately borne away a member of the family. In reply to an inquiry that I put to the hall-porter, I was informed that Lord Wilberton was at home, he having returned from the country-seat in Yorkshire on the previous evening. I mentioned my name and solicited an immediate audience of his lordship. In a few minutes I was ushered up into the drawing-room, where the elder brother of Eustace was seated. He was dressed in deep black, and made not the slightest motion to rise from the sofa as I entered. Whatever change might have taken place in my own circumstances—and however graciously I might be treated as an equal by kind friends elsewhere—it was evident that in the eyes of Lord Wilberton I was but a low menial still. But for the treatment I thus experienced at his hand I should have cared nothing at any time—much less at a moment when my mind was bent on business of too solemn an importance to rivet its attention on trifles.

"Well, young woman," he said, with a look and tone of cool insolence, "what do you want with me?"

"The purpose of this intrusion, my lord," I answered, "can be speedily explained. You may perhaps remember that two years and a half ago your deceased mother, Lady Wilberton, made me acquainted with a certain clause in the will——"

"Well, I know all about it," interrupted his lordship petulantly: "it is the clause in my father's will you are talking about. What have you got to say on the subject?"

"But a few words, my lord," I responded, determined not to be put out of temper by his words or manner, if I could avoid it. "Your lordship's brother, Captain Quentin——"

"Captain! he's no Captain now," again interrupted Lord Wilberton, contemptuously: "he sold his commission—he has made the greatest fool of himself in every shape and way that a man could. I would rather not hear his name mentioned at all—and certainly not in connexion with you. So make haste and tell me what has brought you here."

"To assure your lordship that if I—humble an individual though I am—in any way constitute a barrier to the interests of your brother Mr. Quentin, I am anxious that your lordship should point out the means of effectually removing such obstacle."

"Well, since you speak in this way," he observed, "I don't mind discussing the point with you. Of course you know that my brother is entitled to sixty thousand pounds, subject to a certain condition—which is, that the money is to be paid to him on the day of his marriage, and if such marriage takes place with the consent of his parents, or their heirs, or executors. Now, I am the heir—and I am likewise the sole executor to my mother's will, which reiterates the provisions and injunctions contained in my father's. All this you understand. Now, what do you propose?"

"Whatever your lordship may insist upon," I answered, still remaining standing—for he did not desire me to be seated, and I did not think fit to show any spirit of independence or in any way to irritate him by taking a chair of my own accord.

"Whatever I insist upon?" he repeated. "That is rather a puzzling thing for me."

"Your lordship's brother is in prison," I continued to observe: "his immediate liabilities consist of nearly thirty thousand pounds. Surely, if your lordship receives the fullest guarantees that Mr. Quentin will not act contrary to your lordship's wishes and those of his deceased parents in respect to marriage, you will not suffer him to remain in that dreadful place any longer?"

"It is all very fine talking," rejoined Lord Wilberton; "but what guarantees can be given? How do I know but what you are privately married already?"

"Because, my lord," I answered, in a somewhat excited manner, "I can refer you to the most honourable and trustworthy ladies and gentlemen, who will give you a circumstantial account of all my actions—all my proceedings—indeed, the whole tenour of my life, for some years past. I can refer your lordship to Mr. and Mrs. Kingston of Kingston Grange in Kent—to Mr. and Mrs. Crawford of Trevanion Hall in Essex—and likewise to the Earl and Countess of Chilstone."

"But you don't think I am going to run about making inquiries concerning you, of your masters and mistresses?"

"I have the honour to call them all *friends*, my lord," I replied firmly, and I believe not without a modest dignity. "Your lordship can surely take

the trouble, in such important circumstances, to write to those personages and ascertain the truth of my statement?"

"Then I suppose I am to understand," he said, "that you are no longer in service, and that you have set up as a lady on your own account?"

I felt that my cheeks became crimson: but with a powerful effort I subdued every other indication of resentment, — and replied in a calm, firm voice, "The personages whom I have named are very kind friends to me; and if your lordship would take the trouble to write to them, you would learn all you may seek to know concerning me."

"Well—suppose," he resumed, "that it is all as you say, and that you are not privately married to my brother—what guarantee can you give me that you do *not* mean to be married to him?"

"Whatsoever guarantee your lordship may suggest," I answered, once more with some little degree of vehemence. "There is no bond which can be drawn up too stringent in its terms that I will not sign—I will leave the country—I will hasten away to some far-off clime—I will do anything you may suggest, consistent with honour and propriety, as the condition of Mr. Quentin's extrication from his embarrassments."

"I must suppose, then," observed Lord Wilberton, after a pause, during which he seemed to reflect profoundly, "that you are still very much attached to my brother Eustace, since you display so much interest in him?"

"My lord," I answered, in a voice that was tremulous with my heart's agitated feelings, "I love your brother sufficiently to make any sacrifice to ensure his welfare. I will not for a moment attempt to deny that love of mine; and if I so frankly admit it now, it is for the sake of proving how little selfish it has been. My lord, there were often occasions when it rested with me to become the wife of your brother: but never for a moment did I think of prejudicing his interests while yet the late Lord Wilberton was alive, nor yet of becoming the cause of a contravention of those injunctions which the deceased nobleman left behind him. I need say no more to prove that, great and earnest as my affection has been for your lordship's brother, it has not shown itself the less disinterested."

"Well, well," he said, "I suppose we must admit the truth of all you advance. But, how do I know that if I strain a point and release my brother from gaol, he will not make the first use of his liberty to fly after you, even though you went across the Atlantic and buried yourself in the backwoods of America?"

"I can only promise your lordship that so far as I am concerned, it shall be my endeavour studiously to conceal from Mr. Quentin the future place of my abode."

"But don't you see," he continued, "I am placed in this dilemma? I have only the power to permit my brother to enter on the enjoyment of his own fortune of sixty thousand pounds, or therabouts, on the day that he marries—and marries, too, with my consent. Now, if I find him a wife that I think suitable, will you guarantee that he shall accept her? No—of course you can't; and so, if I pay thirty thousand pounds to get him out of his troubles, it will be money advanced from my own pocket."

"And surely, my lord," I exclaimed "you would

not hesitate to advance that money to rescue your own brother from gaol?"

"I tell you what I will do," responded Lord Wilberton, after another brief interval of reflection. "I know Eustace is deuced sensitive about his honour and all that sort of thing—and that notwithstanding his faults, his word is to be believed. If he will sign an undertaking, couched in the most solemn and binding manner, to renounce all idea of making you his wife—and if you on your part will give an equally sacred and solemn undertaking to leave England and absent yourself for a certain period of years—I will order my solicitor to see about effecting his release."

I felt assured that Eustace Quentin would sign no document of the sort—and that he would sooner linger and languish in gaol than thus formally and deliberately surrender up his hope of one day becoming my husband, small as that hope now was—even if it had the slightest scintillation of existence at all.

"My lord," I said, "will you not be contented with the proposals I have made in reference to myself? I offer to sign any undertaking to leave this country at once—to repair to any distant clime that you may name—and to keep the place of my abode secret from your brother. My lord, if I have hitherto been so scrupulous in preventing him from violating the injunctions of his deceased father, is not my past conduct a guarantee for my future integrity and firmness in this respect?"

"It's all very well talking," exclaimed Lord Wilberton: "but human nature is human nature, —and if I take no guarantee from Eustace, I shall not consider the thing safe. Your scruples may be overcome—you may be over-persuaded—in short, I won't do it on those conditions. You know my terms—let me have an undertaking from each of you—and Mr. Quentin shall be released from prison. On his subsequent conduct will depend what I may afterwards do for him. I have no more to say."

He made an imperious sign for me to leave the room, but did not move from his seat to make any acknowledgment of my parting salutation, nor to ring the bell that I might be shown out. He had treated me as a menial from first to last; and even when arguing with me, it was either with a haughty and distant condescension, or with a cool insolence. As I was descending the stairs, I thought that I should very much like to see the steward, who, if he possessed the confidence of the present Lord Wilberton as he did of the deceased nobleman and lady, might interest himself in Captain Quentin's favour. But I did not see the steward; and I did not like to ask for him. I accordingly issued forth from Wilberton House: and as I went along, reflected upon the course which I ought to pursue. My visit to Piccadilly had not been fraught with the success I had at first anticipated: indeed, I had considered it certain that Lord Wilberton would accept my proposition; and even throughout the discussion, I clung to the same belief until towards its close. But it had failed: and if his lordship continued to adhere to the terms he laid down, I felt assured that they would not be accepted on the part of Eustace Quentin.

It was two o'clock when I left Wilberton House: I knew where to find my brother William at that hour—and I hastened to seek him accordingly. I

asked him if he could spare me a little of his time that afternoon?—he replied cheerfully in the affirmative; and I explained to him wherefore I needed his companionship. As we repaired together in the direction of the King's Bench, I described the nature of the interview which had taken place between Lord Wilberton and myself; and William was much distressed at the bare idea of my leaving England for a long term of years. But he said nothing remonstrative on that part of my proposal to Lord Wilberton; and I saw that he regarded me with affectionate admiration, as if he could not help approving my conduct, much though he would deplore the separation between us to which it might possibly lead.

Little did I think on the occasion when I visited Mrs. Ward in the King's Bench, that I should ever again set foot within its walls: but that place was nevertheless now my destination—and for obvious reasons I had thought it more prudent to repair thither under the escort of my brother. For I knew full well that unfounded suspicions arise quickly—that the tongue of scandal is ever ready to give them speedy circulation—and that the world generally is more inclined to credit the evil than the good which is spoken of persons. A young female proceeding alone to pay a visit to a young gentleman, would be liable to instantaneous suspicion; and the King's Bench was a little town in itself, where, from all I had heard from Mrs. Ward, the morals of the inhabitants were not of that high standard as to preclude the possibility of injurious suspicions, under particular circumstances, either on the part of inmates or visitors. Moreover, I knew that Captain Quentin would appreciate the prudential delicacy of my conduct in being accompanied by William, and would not regard it as in any way exhibiting a want of confidence in his own honour. No: for Eustace possessed a disposition of truly chivalrous magnanimity; and he was utterly incapable of breathing a word or casting a look to bring up a blush to the female cheek.

On entering the precincts of the prison, one of the loungers near the entrance immediately volunteered to conduct William and me to Captain Quentin's room; and thither we accordingly proceeded. As we ascended the narrow stone staircase with the rude iron railings, and beheld the walls of rough brickwork whitewashed over, the cheerlessness of the place struck cold to my heart: the very atmosphere of captivity seemed different from that of freedom out-of-doors. Our footsteps on the stone landings appeared to raise mournful echoes; while the boisterous shouts of the players on the racket-ground, seen from the staircase windows, sounded as if they came from individuals who endeavoured to cheat themselves into the belief that they were happy because they vociferated thus noisily. Oh, what a place, what a place for the high-minded, the elegant, and the intellectual Eustace Quentin to inhabit!

The man who conducted us, received a gratuity and departed. We knocked at the door. Eustace in person opened it—and a cry of joy burst from his lips when he beheld me. He caught me in his arms and covered my cheeks with kisses,—as if our engagement still continued the same—as if our union were only postponed, and not hopeless altogether! Did I immediately disengage myself from

that embrace? was I angry with him for his affectionate fervour? No: not for an instant will I pretend to a strength of mind which I did not possess, nor charge myself with a prudery which I was incapable of displaying.

Poor Eustace was much altered since last I saw him, which was on the eve of my departure from England with Miss Maitland, upwards of nine months back. Naturally slender, though not of effeminate slowness, he now seemed literally thin: his cheeks were pale and careworn—and thus the manly beauty of his countenance was marked by a deeper and more touching interest. He was of course dressed in deep mourning. The tears ran down my cheeks as I thought how much he must have suffered; and I could scarcely repress the sobs which convulsing my heart, rose up into my throat. Eustace had not immediately perceived my brother, so entirely absorbed was he at first with my presence; but when on quitting his arms, I turned aside to wipe away my tears, Eustace, extending his hand to William, said in a tone of mingled cordiality and gratitude, "I need not ask who you are. Accept my sincerest thanks for accompanying your sister to see me in this abode."

"Captain Quentin," answered William, grasping the hand so frankly proffered, "I am delighted and proud to form your acquaintance: but would that our first meeting had been elsewhere!"

"It is a calamity," responded Eustace, "of a heavy nature—but not one that will crush me altogether."

"Heaven forbid!" rejoined William quickly: "there is no situation in life, however unfortunate, that is without hope for those who have faith in Providence."

"You have just repeated the words," said Eustace, "which I breathe to myself every hour of the day. But sit down. My apartment is not the most elegant in the world; nevertheless I have endeavoured to render it as comfortable as possible. Were I possessed of freedom, the presence of whitewashed walls and humble furniture in my dwelling-place, would not be a source of the slightest affliction."

At first the conversation continued upon general topics. I gave Eustace some details in addition to those I had previously conveyed in a letter, respecting poor Laura Maitland's death; and I told him for what purpose I was now staying in London. He on his part entered more fully into the state of his affairs than he had previously been enabled to do through the medium of correspondence; and the discourse having taken this turn, afforded me an opportunity to enter gradually and delicately upon the topic that was uppermost in my mind. I explained to him that immediately on the receipt of his letter at noon, I had called upon his brother. At this he looked both surprised and anxious. Frankly and firmly did I go on to describe all that had taken place, without omitting a single detail, save and except the uncivil treatment I myself had experienced at his lordship's hands. Several times while I was speaking, did Eustace give vent to ejaculations expressive of the various effects this narrative of my proceedings produced upon him,—enthusiastic admiration at the self-sacrifice I had offered to make—nervous apprehension before he learnt that my propositions would not suffice of

themselves—and blended joy and indignation when he heard the additional terms his brother had laid down.

"Then the interview terminated in nothing!" he exclaimed: "and much as I may feel hurt that my brother should seek to exact such conditions from me, I rejoice on the other hand that he imposed them; inasmuch as they cannot be accepted—and therefore, dearest Mary, there will be no need for such a magnanimous self-sacrifice on your part. William, my dear friend," he said, turning to my brother,—"for in those familiar terms must you permit me to address you,—you should be proud of your sister: she is the noblest-hearted of human beings! What! and you would fly away from your native land—you would seek some foreign clime—you would renounce the many kind friends whom your own virtues have raised up around you—you would settle yourself amongst strangers,—and all this, Mary, for my sake—to rescue me from prison?"

"Eustace," I answered, "what have you not done—what have you not suffered on account of me?—Oh, too much! too much! You threw up an honourable profession—you dared the anger of your parents—you refused the conditions on which you might have been put in possession of a noble fortune—you embarked in the casualties and chances of commerce—you have encountered ruin—you have lost your all—you are immured in a gaol,—and everything on account of me! on account of me!"

I could not help wringing my hands as I thus concluded the catalogue of immense self-sacrifices which Eustace Quentim had made on my behalf;—and while he fell upon his knees before me, he seized those hands in his own and pressed them to his lips. My brother, who was profoundly affected, endeavoured to administer consolations to us both.

"No!" cried Eustace, suddenly starting up, and thus giving ejaculatory expression to the resolve which was so firmly fixed in his mind: "never—never will I succumb to my brother's conditions! Mary, listen to what I am about to say: for I speak solemnly to you, in the presence of your brother. I have loved you from the first moment I ever beheld you—for some years has this love lasted—it has grown stronger and stronger—never for a single instant has it been impaired or diminished. This love of mine has become a worship—a creed—a faith: it is to me as another religion—second only in sanctity to that through the medium of which I adore my God. If one religion has had its martyrs, another religion may claim them likewise; and sooner than renounce this love which has become a religion for me, will I endure whatsoever martyrdom the world or the laws may inflict. This oath have I taken a thousand times in the depths of my own heart: this oath do I repeat aloud now!"

"O Eustace, Eustace!" I exclaimed, gazing upon him in tenderness through the tears that filled my eyes: "how fervid is my gratitude for this love which you bear me—but how bitterly do I deplore that it should be the source of such illimitable sorrows! It was imprudent—it was unwise, for me to come to you now: but I could not help it! I had a duty to perform, to urge you to yield to your brother's wishes—and my own heart likewise impelled me hither."

"As for my brother's conditions, Mary, mention them not again!" ejaculated Eustace, vehemently. "Were I base enough to accept them, it would be treason to you—treason to my own heart—treason also to the Providence of God. If it be my destiny to continue unhappy for the rest of my days, then let my unhappiness consist of immurement in a prison, with the sense of my faithful love to console me: but let it not consist in the voluntary surrender of that love, although freedom would be purchased thereby. Perhaps, under all circumstances, I am wrong to address you thus: I am wrong to talk of love in the presence of the frightful barriers which stand before me, almost to the exclusion of hope. And did I think, Mary, that you were capable of loving another—bestowing your hand on that other—and obtaining a settled position in life, I should not talk to you now of this love of mine. But I know that you love me as faithfully and devotedly as I love you; and that as you can never love another, neither will you wed where your heart cannot be given. Thus you and I can speak of love to each other—even though all hope be dead in our hearts of ever seeing it crowned with happiness. You, William," he added, suddenly turning to my brother, "are not displeased that I speak to your sister thus?"

William was so much affected as to be unable to give any reply: but his looks, as well as the cordial frankness with which he seized and pressed the hand of Eustace, showed full plainly that the feeling uppermost in his mind was one of illimitable compassion and sympathy towards us both.

I asked Eustace whether he thought it would have any beneficial effect if I were to call upon his creditors and entreat their mercy on his behalf? I assured him that I would lose no time and spare no pains in carrying out this proposition, if he gave his assent to it—that I would hasten to Liverpool and see the shipowners—that, in short, I would seek those who had demands upon him wheresoever they dwelt—that I would even throw myself at their feet and beg them to release him from prison, so that he might carve out some new career for himself and toil on arduously till he had paid them all honourably. But while he expressed his gratitude for my proposal, he assured me that the attempt would be useless. Knowing him to be connected with one of the richest families in the kingdom, the creditors naturally supposed his relatives or friends would sooner or later come forward to settle his liabilities; and, under such an impression, he felt convinced they would not even listen to any compromise—nothing short of the full "pound of flesh" would satisfy those Shylocks. Then what did he propose to do? was my next question, put amidst feelings of the deepest anguish. Were there no means of obtaining his release? would the law hold him captive there unto all eternity? He explained that there was the process of the Insolvents' Court, which appeared to be his only alternative; and from that he shrank with all the strong loathing and aversion of his high-minded nature. His lawyer had recommended the immediate adoption of this means: but he had emphatically replied in the negative. At all events he would wait: he would rather trust to the chapter of accidents, than take a course which he considered so disgraceful and dishonouring.

We remained two hours with Eustace; and when we took our leave, it was not without a promise on my part that we would visit him again: for was he not there as a victim to the numerous sacrifices he had made to his love for me?

CHAPTER CXLII.

THEOBALD MAITLAND.

In the evening of that same day, at about nine o'clock—just after the candles were lighted in my sitting-room—the maid-servant of the house entered to inform me that a gentleman wished particularly to see me, and that if I scrupled to admit him to my presence, the servant was to intimate that it was in reference to the late Miss Maitland's affairs. Without a moment's hesitation or reflection I desired that the gentleman might be shown up; and in a few moments a person whom I should have little expected to behold seeking me there, made his appearance. This was Theobald Maitland.

The moment I caught sight of his countenance, a cold shudder passed through me; and I actually felt afraid as the servant retired, closing the door behind her and leaving me alone with that man. He was dressed in elegant mourning, as I had seen him at Mr. Wenlock's: his countenance was, if possible, still more deeply furrowed and still more darkly traced with the evidences of dissipation and of evil passions. But he assumed as urbane and conciliatory a look as such a face could possibly conjure up, and which sat like a hideous mockery upon such features. Advancing towards me with two or three very courteous salutations, and apologizing for his intrusion at such an hour, he took a seat uninvited. I knew not how to act. I did not at all like to be alone with that man at such a time of the evening; and yet I could not very well insist that he should leave me,—in the first place, because common prudence dictated that I should hear what he might have to say—and secondly, because I had no power to enforce the mandate, even if uttered. So I sat down on the opposite side of the table, and coldly requested to be informed of the object of his visit.

"I cannot explain it, Miss Price, all in a moment," he answered; "and I beg that if you have no particular engagement, you will grant me a quarter of an hour's discourse."

"But you must have, sir, some specific object in view," said I; "and I beg that you will explain it at once."

"We will come to it very shortly," he answered, in a manner that was perfectly civil, but yet at the same time with a certain resoluteness, as if he chose just to let me perceive that he was determined to remain until he thought fit to develop his purpose. "I see, Miss Price, that you are prejudiced against me. No doubt those Kingstons have been calumniating me—"

"Mr. Maitland," I exclaimed indignantly, "Mr. and Mrs. Kingston are incapable of calumny; and I desire that you will not dare attempt to asperse their characters in my presence."

"Well, well," he said, "we won't use the word calumny: we will mince terms with such a nicety

as to put it in this light—that they have been taking a false view of my character."

"But all this, Mr. Maitland," I interjected, "can have nothing to do with the business for which you have sought me. I again beg, sir, that you will be explicit at once."

"Softly, softly, Miss Price," he said, now assuming the blandest smile it was possible for his countenance to put on. "A young lady of your knowledge of the world, must be aware that it is not courteous to dictate to a visitor how he is to explain his business."

"And you, sir," I rejoined, "with your still greater knowledge of the world, must be aware that it is by no means courteous for a gentleman to introduce himself at such an hour, and commence by raising a discussion before he begins to explain his business."

"Permit me to observe, Miss Price, that the discussion is likely to last some time, unless you will give ear with a tolerable degree of patience to the few prefatory remarks it is absolutely necessary I should make."

While he was thus speaking, the thought arose in my mind that under all circumstances it would be better I should hear everything this man had to say, provided he abstained from maligning my best and dearest friends,—and indeed that it was quite possible the business for which I had tarried in London, might be furthered by whatsoever was about to fall from his lips. So, when he had brought his speech to an end, I made no remark, but by my looks showed that I was waiting for him to explain.

"As I was saying just now," he accordingly continued, "I am fearful that my past proceedings—perhaps even my character itself—may have been misrepresented to you. I will not again say that this has been maliciously done: I will pass over the origin and the motive of such misrepresentations—and I will address myself to the task of refuting them. You are of course aware of what is laid to my charge—that I disputed the will of Mr. Maitland, my late cousin's father. But is not Mr. Kingston now disputing Miss Maitland's will?"

"I beg you to observe, sir," I could not help interrupting him by saying, "that it was not so much the circumstance of your disputing a will that is charged against you, as the means which you took to carry on the process. If you had real claims, you were justified in a legal sense to assert them: but in the absence of all legal claims, you had recourse to means which, as I am given to understand, have constituted the accusations levelled against you."

"Oh, I understand!" he exclaimed: "you have been made to believe that I suborned perjury—altered the dates of some documents and forged others—and that it was only in consequence of a threat of criminal proceedings that I gave up the suit. You see that I am not afraid to mention in plain terms the charges levelled against me: but I tell you emphatically, Miss Price,—and here Mr. Maitland struck his hand hard upon the table,—“they were all calumnies; and I only abandoned the process because, had I persisted, many unpleasant things relative to other branches of the Maitland family would have been brought to light. Persons, deemed legitimate, would have been proved

illegitimately born—the memories of the dead would have been dishonoured——”

“Enough, Mr. Maitland—enough!” I said; “I will not listen to any more of these details:”—for neither the Squire nor Mrs. Kingston had ever gone into them with me, nor did I even until this occasion know the specific charges which had been brought against Theobald Maitland. Therefore as the Squire and his wife had not gone into those particulars, I did not consider it proper to sit and hear them from another source.

“Well, Miss Price,” continued Theobald Maitland, “I will let alone the details. What I wish you to understand is, that I am not the man I have been represented: and the best proof is that your departed friend, poor Laura——But why do you start thus?”

I *could* have told him that it was because I considered her name to be desecrated when uttered by his lips; and that when he spoke of her in a manner as if sorrowing for her loss, it was naught but a vile hypocrisy on his part. But I did not think it worth while to explain the cause of that sudden start which I gave; and as I remained silent, he went on speaking.

“The best proof,” he said, “that my late cousin regarded me as an injured instead of an injuring man, is to be found in the will which she has left behind her.”

“And the truth of which will, Mr. Maitland,” I responded, “you have yet to establish.”

“No, Miss Price,” he retorted, with a kind of mock urbanity: “it is for you and your friends to prove its falsity.”

“If, sir,” I said, “you have come to discuss this point with me, I beg that our interview may end at once. It has already lasted too long. You are acquainted with the name of Mr. Kingston’s solicitor, and whatever communication you may have to make, should be addressed to that gentleman.”

“Gently, Miss Price—gently,” said Theobald Maitland, as I rose from my seat and extended my hand towards the bell-pull: “I am now coming to the object of my visit; and therefore if you will sit down, I do not think that you will regret giving me your attention.”

Still I hesitated for a few moments; but ultimately I did return to my chair, in pursuance of my resolve to hear all that he might have to say, and to communicate it, if worth while, to Mr. Longman.

“There is no doubt,” continued Theobald Maitland, “as to the motive which has induced Mr. and Mrs. Kingston to dispute the will: *that* we understand clearly enough. It is because they have somehow or another got it into their heads that Miss Maitland intended to provide for you better than it appears she has done. Pray don’t interrupt—I am not imputing any selfishness to you. But I am sure you will agree with me that it is perfectly useless to carry on the dispute? The process will be a tedious one, even if it don’t get into Chancery; and if it once gets there, you and I and the next half-dozen generations to come may all have passed away before it will ever get out of Chancery again. Therefore, I dare say you begin to understand my object in calling upon you now. Stop—don’t interrupt me—I have a few more words to say, and I mean to speak very candidly indeed.

We know all that you are doing: we know that you went and made inquiries concerning the witnesses, and that your solicitor has put an advertisement in the newspapers calling for Mr. Hunter to come forward. But he can’t come—for the very simple reason that intelligence was received by Mr. Wenlock yesterday of his death.”

“Ah!” I ejaculated—but not so much at the thought that a most vitally important witness in the will case was lost, as in sudden sorrow on poor *Jemima’s* account: yet, as the next moment my eyes encountered those of Theobald Maitland, there was something in his look which at once struck me with a suspicion that he had given utterance to a falsehood.

“Yes,” he went on to say, “this Mr. Charles Hunter is dead; and therefore, either for my side or your’s, it makes the business all the more difficult and awkward. I happened to be passing along the street this afternoon, when I saw you enter this house; and subsequently ascertaining it to be your place of abode, I thought it best to call in the evening and have a little friendly chat over the business. That is why I am here now. But I will tell you wherefore I chose the evening,” he continued, with a look of sly meaning: “it is because there is all the less chance of my being seen coming here; for as we are at legal loggerheads, it does not look well for one party to call on the other. And now a few words more—and they will be spoken as frankly and plainly as I told you just now I should speak them. I am going to make you two distinct propositions: but if you refuse them both, you need not tell Mr. Longman, or the Kingstons, or any one else, that I did make such proposals—because I should boldly deny having done so. We are within four walls—they have *not* got ears—and whatsoever takes place between us, cannot be corroborated by witnesses.”

My first impulse was indignantly to order from the room a man who so coolly and deliberately informed me that he was about to propose something which, if refused, and then mentioned elsewhere, would be denied: but I thought it better to hear what he had to say; so I subdued the outward evidences of my anger, and kept silent.

“Yes—I have two distinct propositions to make,” he continued: “for I have no doubt that whatsoever you agree to, will obtain the assent of Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, as it is on your behalf and for your benefit they are disputing the will. My first proposition is to let you have ten thousand pounds, and so settle the business,—I of course taking the remainder, but paying Mrs. Kingston’s legacy and also the maid’s. My other proposition——But before I explain it, I may as well once more remind you that I am quite a different person from what I have been represented; and though I say it myself, there is not a better hearted man or a kinder soul in existence than I am—just the person to let people have their own way, and to feel delighted as long as they are happy. Well, Miss Price, that’s what I am. And now, when I proceed to state my second proposition—which is that you and I should make a match, and so have the enjoyment of the money without splitting it——”

“Enough, sir! Begone!”—and starting from my chair, I rang the bell violently. So sudden was this proceeding on my part, that Theobald Maitland



himself sprang up in affright; and as I thought that he was about to advance towards me, I pealed again at the bell.

"You accursed fool!" he cried; "you will alarm the whole house!"—and flinging upon me a look of the darkest, most diabolical malignity—a look of such fiend-like hatred that it haunted me for hours afterwards—he hurried from the room. Mrs. Chaplin, as I subsequently learnt, was herself hurrying up the stairs when she encountered Theobald Maitland running down; and as the light of the hall-lamp fell upon his features, their dreadful expression sent a chill of horror through the woman's form. Having seen him safe out of the house, she came up to me to inquire whether I had sustained any insult at his hands? I at once explained to her everything that had taken place; so that if the circumstance entered as a feature into any subsequent judicial inquiry in respect to the will case, my testimony respecting the evening's scene

might be so far corroborated by Mrs. Chaplin that I lost no time in giving her all the details. She observed that she had never in her life beheld a human countenance on which the hand of Satan himself appeared to have so deeply stamped such terrible things; and she was quite relieved that he should be no longer beneath that roof, as she felt certain he was fully capable of doing any one a mischief. She farther observed that his visit and the two propositions he had made, ought to be regarded as a proof of a consciousness on his part that his cause was a desperate one; and in this view of the case I was inclined to agree. I lay awake for a considerable time that night, thinking of this strange interview with Theobald Maitland, and wondering whether his statement relative to Charles Hunter's death were true or false: but I was still more inclined to believe that it was a fabrication than a reality.

On the following morning, immediately after

breakfast, I proceeded to Mr. Longman's office, and communicated to that gentleman all that had taken place between Theobald Maitland and myself. He listened with the greatest attention; and when I had finished, he said, "All this is important enough, as justifying our suspicions of foul play on the other side. I am also inclined to think that so far from Mr. Hunter being dead, our opponents are frightened lest he should come forward. I will repeat the advertisements, which as yet have produced no effect. There is one material fact that I have succeeded in discovering. It is that Joshua Armstrong, the grocer, was believed to be in excessively embarrassed circumstances a few months back: but he very recently settled his liabilities in a somewhat sudden manner, and hinted to two or three of his neighbours that a relation had advanced him a loan for the purpose of extending his business. You will of course, Miss Price, write and inform Mr. and Mrs. Kingston relative to the particulars of Theobald Maitland's visit and interview. We must have patience: but I really do believe the web will be unravelled and the truth elicited."

"Do you, then," I asked, "suspect that Mr. Wenlock is a party to the fraud, supposing one to have been really committed?"

"If, Miss Price, a fraud—or a forgery, as it must be," responded the lawyer, cautiously and warily, "has been committed, Mr. Wenlock cannot possibly be otherwise than an accomplice—indeed, the principal agent. But mind, I don't say that it is so: I only say that there seem to be tolerably just grounds for our suspicions."

"I certainly thought until recently," said I, "that Mr. Wenlock was a very respectable man; and I am sure that poor Miss Maitland entertained a similarly favourable opinion of him."

"Ah—respectable!" said Mr. Longman curtly, and with a certain drawing-in of the mouth. "There are numbers of persons who are considered highly respectable, because they have never been detected in anything wrong, and seem to pay their way with regularity. Mr. Wenlock is a money-lender—and, I believe, not over particular how much interest he charges, or at what rate he accommodates his wealthy clients. His object is to make money, even though he should be grinding it out of the very vitals of the borrowers. Do you know, Miss Price, that it is such men as these who fill the Debtors' Prisons and feed the Insolvents' Court? It is such men as these, too, who bring discredit on the legal profession, and cause the entire body of practitioners to be looked upon as a horde of sharks and harpies. But still, as the world goes, Mr. Wenlock is a respectable man. Whether he will continue to be deemed so much longer, the result of this will case of our's must prove."

I took my leave of Mr. Longman; and returning to my lodgings in Conduit Street, wrote a long letter to Mrs. Kingston, explaining all that had taken place in respect to Theobald Maitland. Scarcely had I completed the epistle, when the maid entered, introducing a respectably dressed female, whom, though she wore a veil over her countenance, I instantaneously knew by her stature, her figure, and her gait, to be the Gipsy Queen.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

A MYSTERIOUS PLAN PROPOSED.

THE maid withdrew—Barbauld flung up her veil—and the most cordial greetings passed between us. I was rejoiced, but at the same time much agitated at her presence. The hope thrilled through my heart that the time was now come when all mystery in respect to my poor father would perhaps be cleared up, and that we should meet again: but that hope was instantaneously succeeded by the fear that I might all along have been mistaken in respect to the identity of the man Graham with my sire, and that the latter might in reality have ceased to exist—or again, that if he were indeed alive, he would refuse to see me—or else that Barbauld herself would not make me aware of the truth. Thus, the first few moments of her presence were fraught with strong and exciting feelings for me.

I made her sit down and take off her bonnet. She looked somewhat careworn: but the extraordinary beauty of her countenance—I should rather say handsomeness, if there were such a word—was but little impaired. Her superb eyes shone with their wonted lustre: her magnificent teeth seemed like rows of ivory within the parting lips: her hair was of deepest, darkest black, unstreaked by a single thread of silver.

"I have been long absent, Mary," she observed, after the first greetings were exchanged; "and perhaps you may deem it unkind that I never wrote to you: but my silence must not be taken as a proof that I never thought of you—because it were wrong to make such a deduction. I have thought of you often and often; and I longed to write. But I could not—I could not!"

I gazed upon her in mingled surprise and painful suspense: for I feared that she must have passed through the ordeal of some great misfortunes—perhaps even of captivity—that she should have thus been unable to communicate with me during the interval of an absence of eighteen months.

"You marvel at what I have just said," she went on to observe: "but the explanation is speedily given. The race to which I belong has its rites and its ceremonies as well as other nations and tribes; and my mother's death imposed upon me a duty which I was bound to accomplish. This was nothing else than a pilgrimage to Egypt—the land from which my people took their origin. During this pilgrimage it was incumbent on me to abstract my thoughts as much as possible from all worldly things—to lose sight of even my best and dearest friends, of whom you, dear Mary, stand at the head. I will not enter upon any particulars in respect to that long, long pilgrimage: nor may I explain the precise object for which it was undertaken. Suffice it to say that it has been accomplished—that I have returned in safety from the land of ancient pyramids—and that last night I once more entered the English metropolis. On repairing to the house in St. Giles's, I found all your letters; and, as you see, I have lost no time in presenting myself before you."

"Then the old female whom you left in charge of the house, was doubtless all the time acquainted with the purpose of your journey and its destination?"

"She was so," answered Barbauld: "but she dared give no syllable of explanation on the subject. I see by your letters, dear Mary, that you need my presence on a very particular and important subject: I find also that you likewise have been a traveller—that you have visited France and Italy—and that you have lost a dear and valued friend. I condole with you—I sympathize with you profoundly. Pardon me for appearing to be inquisitive—I can assure you that it is only the deep interest I take in your welfare which leads me to ask whether your circumstances are now placed on a footing of complete independence?"

"My dear Barbauld," I answered, "I will deal in perfect candour with you, because I am about to solicit an equal amount of frankness on your part."

I then explained to her the whole particulars in respect to the will case—the object for which I was remaining in London—the interview I had with Joshua Armstrong—the visit I received from Theobald Maitland—and the measures that were being adopted to induce Mr. Hunter to come forward. The Gipsy Queen listened with the greatest attention, and spoke not a word until I had made an end of my narrative.

"We will converse presently," she said, when I had ceased speaking, "upon all that you have been telling me. You must now explain the important business for which you have so much desired to see me."

"Barbauld Azetha," I responded, drawing my chair more closely towards her, looking her steadily in the face, and speaking in a tone of solemn earnestness,—“you have on many, many occasions rendered me the greatest possible services. You saved my life at Herne Bay—you gave my poor brother a home in the last hours of his existence—at my request you took measures to demonstrate the innocence of that very same Charles Hunter of whom I have been speaking—in short, you have conferred upon me a mass of obligations which I can never repay.”

"And well did you merit them at my hands, dear Mary!" responded Barbauld. "Most ready and anxious too have I ever been to make you an atonement for the treachery in which I so unfortunately was induced to bear a part during the earliest period of our acquaintance: I mean in respect to the transactions in Derbyshire, when you were persecuted by that man whose name can never more pass my lips."

"Recur not to the disagreeable incidents of the past," said I. "Whatsoever you might have done then, has been since atoned for a hundred-fold. I repeat that I owe you the deepest obligations, and which can never be repaid. But there is yet one boon which I seek at your hands; and I conjure you, Barbauld, to deal with me frankly and candidly in this respect—"

"Mary," interrupted the Gipsy Queen, "I can fathom the nature of your thoughts. You are about to repeat a question which you have before addressed to me?"

"Yes," I exclaimed, in an agitated and excited manner: "circumstances have transpired since we last met, which have redoubled all my former anxiety to have that one mystery cleared up. More than ever do I long to behold my father, if he be

still a dweller upon this earth. O Barbauld! you will not reject the prayer of a daughter thus craving for intelligence respecting a parent whom she has every reason to believe is still alive! Yes—for I must regard him with the same filial love as if he were indeed the author of my existence—although I fear—"

But I stopped short: for in the hurry and excitement of my brain I was touching upon delicate ground and approaching the sacred receptacle of my mother's secret.

"Mary," answered the Gipsy Queen, taking my hand and gazing upon me with a look of singularly mournful interest, "you know not how you distress me by making this appeal to which I am unable to give any satisfactory answer. I can only repeat what I have before said—that you are altogether wrong in identifying that man Graham with your own father. I beseech you, my dear friend, not to give way to impassioned outbursts of excited feeling! It does me harm to see you weep: for I love you, Mary—and every tear that you shed, falls like molten lead on my heart. Believe me—Oh! believe me, that if it were in my power to give you any welcome intelligence, I should be but too ready to impart it."

The Gipsy Queen had spoken with far more vehemence than generally characterized her language or her manner; and her looks corroborated the sincerity of her friendly and affectionate assurances. How could I urge the matter farther? how could I press her for revelations which she was either in reality unable to make, or concerning which her lips were hermetically sealed? I saw that it was useless: and my soul sank down from its excitement into a profound melancholy, as the wing-wearied bird from the height to which it has towered sinks back into the gloom of its forest-home.

"And now, Mary," continued the Gipsy Queen, after a pause, "let us speak of these affairs which are keeping you in London. Even while you were explaining those matters to me just now, a project developed itself in my mind—which, if carried out, will I think lead to a complete unravelment of this mysterious web of frauds and forgeries. In my opinion every step that is taken on your side by means of legal process, only enables the opposite party to strengthen their own position. They observe the motions of the enemy, and throw up defences accordingly. In short, the delays inevitably engendered by a wearisome law-process, may prove fatal to your cause in the long run. This Charles Hunter may, or may not, be forthcoming. If he be a dishonest man and an accomplice in the plot, his presence would injure your cause and strengthen that of your opponents: he would affirm that the will is genuine—and how could you disprove it?"

"But if he be an honest man?" I suggested.

"Then, depend upon it that Wenlock and Theobald Maitland have so well disposed of him, that he will not be forthcoming."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated: "do you imagine—"

"That they have murdered him? No: I do not think that—although if they are capable of forgery, they will scarcely hesitate at a greater crime in order to secure themselves against detection with regard to the first. I do not even believe more than you yourself do, that Mr. Hunter is dead: but

these villains may have possibly got him so well out of the way—despatched him perhaps to such a distance—that the chances are a hundred to one he will never see the advertisements desiring him to come forward. But there is another important point which you appear to have overlooked,” continued Barbauld Azetha. “Suppose that the late Miss Maitland did make a certain will and did deposit it in Mr. Wenlock’s hands—then let us suppose that a false will was fabricated—what follows? Why, that if you succeed in proving this latter to be false, it does not of necessity arise that the real one shall be brought forward; and in default of the genuine document being produced, you will be no nearer the attainment of your end than you are at present.”

“Do not think, Barbauld,” I said, “that I am pursuing the matter with the selfish hope of benefiting myself.”

“Well, but your desire is that the intentions of the late Miss Maitland shall be carried out in respect to her property, whatever they may have been—no matter whether your own interests are largely involved therein, or not. Now, it is of the first importance to ascertain what the contents of the genuine will really were—and likewise to discover whether that will be in existence, or whether it has been destroyed.”

“But this, Barbauld,” I observed, “would be to hope or to suppose that the criminals themselves—if such they really are—could be led to confess their own iniquity.”

“One of them may perhaps be induced to make such confession,” rejoined the Gipsy Queen. “At all events, if you trust to the course of legal proceedings, you will be wearied by delays, and may haply fail in the long run: whereas, if you give me permission to carry out the project I have formed, depend upon it that within a few hours important discoveries shall be made. You know, Mary, that I am not a person who speaks at random—nor am I accustomed to boast of what I am unable to perform.”

I was struck with the truthfulness of these remarks: for I was well acquainted with the Gipsy Queen’s decision of character, her shrewdness, and her far-seeing sagacity. But still I could not immediately give an assent to her proposal: she must explain her project—and I must then communicate with Mr. Longman and Mr. Kingston. These were the representations I made to her.

“No, Mary,” answered Barbauld; “the business is not to be conducted in this way. Delays are dangerous; and while you are consulting a solicitor in London and writing to a friend in Kent, the enemy is strengthening his position. I purpose to strike a sudden blow, which, if effective, will bring the matter to a speedy issue—but which, should it fail, will have done no harm and only left the business just where it was before. Depend upon it, I would do nothing to compromise you in the affair: I have your interests too much at heart. This very evening, if you will, my project shall be carried into execution.”

“Accept my sincerest thanks, Barbauld,” I answered, “for the assistance you so generously proffer. I am aware of your kind feeling towards myself—your sagacity—and your discretion; and were the affair wholly mine, I would leave it in your hands at once.”

“But are you not here in London to conduct it?” she asked: “have you not been left as it were with full powers? Mr. Longman is a mere agent—and you need not trouble yourself about him. As for Mr. Kingston, he will be only too much delighted if the matter can be brought to a termination by a bold stroke.”

There was so much justice in Barbauld Azetha’s words, that my hesitation to entrust the business in her hands was well nigh banished; and she moreover spoke with so much confidence as to the result of her project, that I thought it would be unwise to abandon to the law’s delays an affair which she was so sure of bringing to a prompt issue. I reasoned to myself that there was a possibility of erring as much through a weak vacillation as through a bold precipitancy; and I was well assured that the Kingstons would give me the full credit of doing everything for the best.

“Will you not afford me some idea of your scheme?” I asked, after a pause, during which I had made the preceding reflections.

“Not now, Mary,” was her decisive response. “You know whether you can trust me or not—”

“And it seems,” I hastened to add, “almost to display an insulting and unkind want of confidence by this hesitation on my part. Forgive me that I have thus wavered, Barbauld: but I repeat, the business is not my own! However, I assent: you shall carry out your views—and this evening, if you will. Can I assist? am I to take a part in your plans?”

“Yes,” she replied: “you will have to go with me. At nine o’clock this evening I shall fetch you in a hackney-coach.”

“And you stipulate,” I said, inquiringly, “that I am not to consult Mr. Longman?”

“Consult nobody—leave it all to me,” returned the Gipsy Queen, in a tone of proud confidence. “I am much mistaken if we do not accomplish in a single half-hour more than the law could do in a month or a year. But remember—if once I undertake this business of your’s, you must suffer me to prosecute it in my own way: you must ask me no questions—you must not seek to know more than I may by degrees choose to tell you. Do not look doubtful and uncertain again: do not be startled with what I have just said! I repeat, your interests shall not be compromised: much less am I capable of leading you into any dilemma. And now farewell, until nine o’clock this evening.”

We shook hands; and the Gipsy Queen took her departure, leaving me in a strange state of bewilderment as to what her project could possibly be, but not the less resolved to fulfil my promise and suffer her to have her own way.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

EXECUTION OF BARBAULD’S PROJECT.

I WAS in readiness for the expected summons at nine o’clock; and precisely at that hour I heard a vehicle stop in front of the house. There was a knock at the door; and in a few moments the Gipsy Queen, dressed as I had seen her in the morning, made her appearance. We exchanged

but a few words, and descended the stairs together. Just as we issued from the street-door, she said to me in a hasty whisper, 'You will find other persons in the coach: therefore do not be startled.'

We entered the vehicle, which immediately drove away, the driver having evidently received his instructions. The Gipsy Queen and I sat together on the back seat: opposite to us were two men, who, at the first glance which I threw upon them in the semi-obscurity of the vehicle, appeared each to have on a sort of livery: but I soon was enabled to observe that they wore the uniforms of police-constables. I was astounded at this discovery: for if any one were to be given into custody in respect to the presumed will-forgery, I could not see for what earthly purpose the intervention of the Gipsy Queen was required. What fact, hitherto unknown to me, could have come to her knowledge, thus warranting her to take such extreme proceedings against any individual in connexion with the affair? I had all along thought her plan involved some proceeding, which, if it failed, would not reach the ears of Mr. Longman: but it now appeared to me, let it end how it might, that it would be certain to obtain the utmost publicity,—inasmuch as an examination at the police-court on the following morning must be the result of the arrest to be effected this night. Thus Mr. Longman would be sure to hear of it: and would he not feel hurt and offended that the business had as it were been taken out of his hands?

I was in the midst of these disagreeable reflections, when the Gipsy Queen, evidently fathoming my thoughts, pressed my arm; and as I looked round upon her, the light of the shops we were passing at the time poured their rays into the coach. I beheld something reassuring in the good-humoured archness of the expression which was upon her handsome countenance; while her scarlet lips were wreathed into a smile, displaying the ivory magnificence of her teeth.

"Fear nothing, Mary," she whispered. "I am am very much mistaken if there will be any exposure—much less any disturbance. You will see how quietly the whole transaction will be managed. But ask no questions."

I bent upon her a look of gratitude for the pleasing assurances she had just given me: though I could not for the life of me conjecture how the intervention of the police could be engaged without publicity resulting therefrom. But I supposed that she knew best: and I followed her injunctions not to put any interrogatory. The coach continued to roll onward: and no more conversation took place. The two constables sat as silent and motionless as statues: they did not even exchange a single word with each other; nor did the Gipsy Queen address them by means of the slightest remark during the journey. It was, as I had suspected, in the direction of Hammersmith that we proceeded; and now I was bewildering myself with speculations as to whom the officers were about to take into custody. Was it Wenlock? was it Theobald Maitland? or was it Joshua Armstrong?—or was it all three? My suspense was certainly great as to the issue of the project, however limited or extensive it might prove to be.

The coach turned into the street in which Joshua Armstrong's establishment was situated; and it

almost immediately stopped—but not at the door of the house itself: the halt was made some half-dozen houses off.

"You must wait here, Mary, for a few minutes," said the Gipsy Queen, as she alighted from the vehicle when the coachman opened the door. The two constables followed her: they all three proceeded in the direction of Joshua Armstrong's house—while I watched them from the window of the vehicle. It was at the private door of the dwelling that they knocked; and in a few moments I beheld them enter. My feelings of suspense were now worked up to the highest pitch, as I sat alone within that coach. What would be the issue of the proceeding? If Armstrong were an innocent man, would he not indignantly resent a treatment which in that case would really be as outrageous as it was summary? and if he were guilty, would he make a confession? I knew not what to think: my hopes were equally counterbalanced by my fears. Ten minutes thus elapsed: but they seemed to me the space of an hour. At the expiration of that really short interval, I beheld the Gipsy Queen hastily approaching the vehicle: and coming up to the window, she said in a voice which, though subdued, was nevertheless exultant in its tone, "All has succeeded as I thought, Mary: the villain has confessed—the will is a forgery! You can now come with me."

With beating heart I descended from the coach, and hastily followed the Gipsy Queen to Joshua Armstrong's house. The private door stood ajar: we entered—and she at once led the way to a well-furnished sitting-room up-stairs. There I beheld Armstrong pacing to and fro in a very excited manner, but with a countenance that was ghastly pale, and its expression terror-stricken. One of the officers sat in a chair near the door—and the other had placed himself at a little distance; and both looked as calm and unconcerned as if it were the most ordinary occurrence in the world.

"Miss Price," said Armstrong, the moment I made my appearance in the footsteps of the Gipsy Queen, "you will spare me—you will have mercy upon me—you will repeat the promise your friend here has already made!"

"The matter," I at once answered, "is in her hands."

"I have already given you the assurance, Mr. Armstrong," said Barbauld Azetha, "that everything depends upon the way in which you yourself behave."

"Tell me what I am to do—tell me what you require of me?" ejaculated the miserable man, who was trembling from head to foot with fearful agitation and excitement; "and I will do it—I will do it! But for heaven's sake do not expose me—do not ruin me!"

"Calm yourself—or you will be fit for nothing," said the Gipsy Queen sternly: and I could tell by her manner that she experienced a sovereign contempt for the wretched man who, though having the courage to become the accomplice in a crime, proved a grovelling coward when its consequences exploded around him. "I have told you," she continued, "that you can avoid exposure if you will: I have told you likewise that these officers, though having full authority to take you into custody, will not object to a private settlement

of the transaction: and they will of their own accord corroborate the assertion."

Armstrong threw an anxiously appealing glance upon them, one after the other; and he who was seated nearest the door, said, "Yes—it's all right enough, if you choose to make it so."

"Then what do you require?" again asked the grocer, who now appeared to be a little more tranquil in his mind.

"Let us sit down," said the Gipsy Queen. "Now," she continued, when her suggestion was complied with, "you will answer me, deliberately and in detail, all those questions which I hurriedly put to you just now. You admit that the will, making over the great bulk of the property to Theobald Maitland, is a forged one?"

"It is," responded the grocer.

"You are acquainted with the contents of the original will, signed by Miss Maitland, and witnessed by yourself?"

"I am," was the reply.

"Then state the provisions thereof."

"It bequeathed the sum of five thousand pounds to Mrs. Kingston—five hundred pounds to the favourite lady's-maid—and five hundred pounds to the physician under whose care Miss Maitland resided for some time. All the remainder, amounting to about twenty-nine thousand pounds, was bequeathed to Miss Price, as sole executrix."

An indescribable feeling—the faintness of joy, blended with anxious fear lest the hope never should be realized—came over me: for the thought flashed to my brain that if I obtained possession of the property to which I was thus entitled, I might perform a certain action which would fill the brightest and most felicitous chapter in the history of my life. Barbauld Azetha flung upon me a glance which seemed to bid me entertain every possible hope and dispel every possible fear: but I still continued under the influence of feelings which can perhaps be better imagined than described, until a sudden gush of tears relieved me; and I wept—Oh! I wept profusely, as I thought of that generous-hearted friend whom I had loved as a sister—who had treated me in the same light—but who was gone, never to return!

"The next question I have to ask you, Mr. Armstrong," said Barbauld, "is whether a certain Charles Hunter is likewise an accomplice in the forgery that has been perpetrated?"

"I do not know," replied the grocer: "on my soul, I am ignorant! But if you ask me what my suspicion is, I should certainly say *yes*: for he left the neighbourhood suddenly—"

"All that we know—and we do not want mere suspicions," interrupted Barbauld: "nothing but certainties. I have now to ask you to tell me once more, deliberately and confidently, whether or not the original will is still in existence?"

"It is," responded Armstrong. "I know it is from several circumstances. In the first place, when Mr. Wenlock,—knowing that I was in difficulties, and indeed having me completely in his power, through the loans he had advanced, and for the reimbursement of which he was pressing me,—when he, I say, first proposed that I should enter into this scheme and give my name as a witness to the forged will, he said distinctly it was his intention to keep the original one; so that if the worst should come

to the worst, it might serve as the means of an amicable compromise and lead to the stifting of extreme proceedings. Subsequently, when I was introduced to Mr. Theobald Maitland, Wenlock told me privately that he still adhered to his determination to keep the original will, in order to hold it in terror over so slippery a customer, and compel him to give him (Wenlock) the share agreed upon, should the forged will answer the desired purpose. I remember that I said to Wenlock, 'But how could you possibly put such a threat into execution, even if Theobald Maitland should prove treacherous? how could you really produce the genuine will before the world?'—To this Wenlock replied, 'Wouldn't it be easy to say that Miss Maitland had scarcely signed one will, when she altered her intentions and had another drawn up directly? and then the genuine one would be produced as the *second*, and it need never be acknowledged that the first one produced was a forgery. It would merely look strange: nothing more.'—Therefore, from all these circumstances," added Armstrong, "I am confident the genuine will is in existence—and what's more, somewhere in Wenlock's house at this present moment."

"That will do," said the Gipsy Queen. "We must now go back to the hackney-coach; and you, Mr. Armstrong, will come with us."

"But I shall be ruined—I shall be ruined!" cried the unhappy man, "if seen passing through the street in company with policemen! What must my servant already think—"

"Fear nothing," interrupted Barbauld Azetha. "I promised to be merciful to you—and we will not do things by halves. Your crime has been great: but the reparation you are making is ample. We will therefore spare you to the utmost of our power. You can easily drop a word to your servant, making any excuse you think fit for the presence of these officers: and no one will contradict you. As for being seen walking through the street with them, it shall not be so. They shall leave the house first. You will accompany Miss Price and me; and as I shall take your arm, I am very certain you will not escape, even if you were to make the attempt."

Having thus spoken, she made a sign to the two constables, who at once rose and left the room. In a few moments we heard the front door close: but we still waited nearly five minutes,—during which Armstrong took a glass of wine. He offered a similar refreshment to the Gipsy Queen and myself. Barbauld refused anything; but I begged to have a glass of water—for my throat was parched, and I felt strangely nervous in consequence of all I had heard, and of the prospect I beheld of soon finding myself in possession of a very considerable sum of money.

"Now let us take our departure," said the Gipsy Queen. "You go first, Mary: Mr. Armstrong will follow; and I shall bring up the rear. Take care—But no," she suddenly interrupted herself: "the warning is unnecessary."

"If you meant to bid me beware how I endeavoured to escape," said Armstrong, again trembling from head to foot, "it is indeed unnecessary. I am not so besotted! I know that the officers would be upon my track in a moment—that a hue and cry would be raised—that the whole neighbourhood would be aroused! But tell me—do tell me

once more—that you mean to keep your word—that you are not going to take me to—to——”

He could not induce himself even to gasp or falter out the word *prison*; though it was easy to comprehend that this would have been the dread termination of his sentence.

“Solemnly and sacredly do I assure you,” responded the Gipsy Queen, “that if all progresses well—as I hope and trust it will—there need be no exposure, much less any necessity to trouble the turnkeys of a prison. And now let us take our departure.”

According to the arrangement already suggested by Barbauld Azetha, I went out first—Armstrong followed—and she herself came last. The woman-servant,—hearing us descend, and perhaps having some little curiosity to know what was going on,—made her appearance to open the street-door; and Armstrong took the opportunity to observe in a hasty manner that his presence was required temporarily elsewhere, in consequence of something unpleasant that had happened to a friend. We then issued forth, Barbauld at once taking the grocer by the arm; and, as she afterwards told me, she held him in such a manner as to render it impossible for him to escape. We proceeded towards the hackney-coach, at which the constables were standing; and the moment they perceived us coming, they entered it. I was about to step in likewise, when I heard my name suddenly mentioned; and looking round, beheld Charles Hunter hurrying towards me. A bright lamp that was blazing over a public-house door close by, had thrown its rays upon my countenance in such a manner that he was instantaneously enabled to recognise me.

“Ah!” I exclaimed, naturally excited by this sudden appearance of one who was so deeply implicated, whether for good or for evil, in what was going on; “your presence here at this moment is fortunate indeed!”

“But what is the matter?” he demanded, with a surprise that struck me as being either most unfeigned, or else admirably simulated. “Mr. Armstrong with you, too! But, Ah! what does it all mean?”—for he had just caught sight of the uniforms inside the coach.

“Can you not conjecture?” I asked, looking at him earnestly.

“Conjecture? No!—how can I?” he exclaimed, with every appearance of an increased amazement. “I saw an advertisement in a newspaper—I hurried up to London—I have just been to Mr. Longman’s—but I could not see him. I am now on my way to call on Mr. Wenlock——”

“And we are about to proceed thither also,” said the Gipsy Queen, who from the conversation had of course gathered that this was the Charles Hunter of whom so much had been spoken. “Do you know that Miss Maitland is dead?”

“Indeed! I was not aware of it—I have been comparatively out of the world—it was by the merest accident I saw the newspaper. Miss Price,” he went on to say, “while in one sense I sympathize with you deeply for the loss of a friend,—yet in another sense I congratulate you on your good fortune.”

“Mr. Hunter,” I exclaimed exultingly, as I extended him my hand, which until this moment I had not done, “I am rejoiced to hear you thus speak!”

“And I also,” said the Gipsy Queen. “But we must not stand conversing here: the passers-by will think it strange. Proceed on foot, Mary, with Mr. Hunter, that you may converse together. We can meet again in the street where Mr. Wenlock lives.”

I accordingly moved away in company with Mr. Hunter, who, as the reader may suppose, was much surprised at these proceedings which were fraught with mystery for him: for that he was innocent of any complicity in the fraud respecting the will, had become apparent enough. I cannot describe how immense was the relief which I had experienced on receiving the conviction that it was so,—not merely for his own sake, but still more for that of *Jemima*, whom I had known so long and liked so much. As we proceeded in the direction of Mr. Wenlock’s house, which was about a quarter of a mile distant, I explained to Charles Hunter everything that had taken place. At first he was astounded: but when he learnt that his name had appeared in attestation of the forged will, he became terribly excited, vowing and protesting that he would render Mr. Wenlock amenable to justice for the guilty fabrication of his signature. I had some difficulty in persuading Mr. Hunter to moderate his feelings: I explained to him that it would be far better to have the whole affair settled privately if possible, as I did not wish the loved and honoured name of my deceased friend *Laura Maitland*, nor any affairs posthumously connected with her, to be dragged into a court of justice. I represented to Mr. Hunter that I myself was not vindictive; and that if I obtained my rights, I could well afford to leave the guilty parties to such punishment as their own consciences, as well as the bitterness of baffled villany, would be sure to inflict. Moreover, I informed him that the wretched Armstrong had received a solemn pledge for his own impunity, should the result prove satisfactory. Mr. Hunter, recovering a certain degree of tranquillity, said that he was under obligations of too sacred a character towards myself, not to yield to my wishes in all things,—that he had never forgotten how it was through me his innocence had been made apparent when he was accused of self-appropriating his employer’s funds; and that he was incapable of rewarding so much goodness by any ingratitude on his own part. Then, in a few hurried words, he explained that he had been sent down into a remote and out-of-the-way place in Wales, to attend to certain business-matters connected with a mine in which Mr. Wenlock was interested as solicitor to the Company working it,—that his situation there was an agreeable and lucrative, and also a permanent one—but that he had now no doubt it had been procured for him in order to get him out of the way while the fraud in connexion with the will was being carried into operation.

By the time these explanations were concluded, we reached the street in which Mr. Wenlock resided; and we perceived the hackney-coach waiting at a little distance from that gentleman’s house. We found that none of those who were inside the vehicle had as yet alighted: they were tarrying for us.

“Oh, Mr. Armstrong!” said Charles Hunter, looking in at the window, “how could you possibly have lent yourself to this black iniquity?”

“Do not upbraid him, Mr. Hunter,” I said: “he is making every possible atonement.”

The Gipsy Queen now alighted from the vehicle, followed by the grocer, who was so thoroughly humiliated and ashamed of himself, that he could not look Mr. Hunter in the face. The constables remained inside the coach; and Barbauld kept a tight hold of Armstrong. Not that there was indeed any fear of his escape: but it was at all events a judicious precaution on her part. She now asked me whether I would accompany them into the solicitor's presence—or whether I would prefer to remain where I was? I was about to reply in favour of the latter alternative, when it occurred to me that it was a duty I owed to myself, as well as to the Kingstons who had initiated all the proceedings in opposition to the forged will, to watch the progress of the affair unto the end. So, after a few instants' hesitation, I decided upon accompanying the others to the solicitor's house.

"Then go you thither first, Mary," said Barbauld, "and ascertain if he be at home. We will watch from this little distance, and if we see you enter the house, we will immediately follow. But if he be not within, you can inquire when he is expected to return—and we will shape our course accordingly."

I at once obeyed the Gipsy Queen's directions; and proceeding to Mr. Wenlock's house, knocked at the front-door. It was at once opened by a footman in livery: and in reply to my query, he said that his master was at home, but was engaged with a gentleman. I answered that my business was of the utmost importance, and begged him to take in my name. This the footman did; and Mr. Wenlock immediately made his appearance in the hall.

"Pray walk in, Miss Price," he said, with the utmost urbanity of manner, and extending his hand: but this of course I did not take, and only bowed coldly. "Will you walk this way?" he then said, suddenly becoming haughty and distant.

"One moment!" I exclaimed, as the footman was about to close the front-door: "there are others with me."

Scarcely had I thus spoken, when the Gipsy Queen and Armstrong entered together, closely followed by Charles Hunter. I looked at Mr. Wenlock, and perceived that he started visibly,—while a dead pallor seized upon his countenance: but immediately on recovering his self-possession, he hurriedly led the way into a back parlour, where there were lights. He did not utter a word till we had all entered, and he had closed the door. Then, as if he had only just recognized Jemima's husband amongst those who had followed him to that room, he exclaimed, "Why, Hunter! what has brought you up to London?"

I could see that beneath all this effrontery, there was a very serious trouble in that man's guilty mind.

"Wherefore have I come to London, sir?" replied Mr. Hunter in a stern voice: "Ask your own conscience whether my presence here is to consolidate fraud or to establish the empire of justice? Ask yourself for what motive you sent me out of the way—for what purpose you caused it to be reported to Miss Price that I was dead—and wherefore you are trembling now, at this very moment?"

Wenlock glanced uneasily towards Armstrong, whose abashed and discomfited demeanour was but little calculated to inspire the solicitor with renewed confidence.

"All is discovered, Mr. Wenlock," said the Gipsy Queen; "and I at once demand at your hands the genuine will which was signed by the deceased Laura Maitland."

"For heaven's sake do not refuse—do not hesitate!" cried Armstrong, in a voice trembling with excitement; "or you will ruin yourself—you will ruin me! The constables are close at hand——"

"Constables!" ejaculated Wenlock, now literally staggering back, and sweeping his dismayed looks around.

"Yes—constables!" said the Gipsy Queen. "There are two of them in a hackney-coach close by. Mr. Armstrong can tell you whether or not he has been in their custody."

"Constables!" again repeated Wenlock, now utterly aghast. "Good God!" he cried, in a voice of anguish; "then, exposure is inevitable!"

"No—not inevitable," quickly rejoined the Gipsy Queen: "those constables are bribed to let the affair be hushed up, if amicably settled."

"Is this true? is this true?" exclaimed Wenlock, his countenance suddenly lighting up with the animation of hope. "Miss Price, is it indeed true? You will forgive me?—and you, Hunter?"

"The will, sir—the will!" exclaimed Charles sternly: "surrender it at once, and you will then have nothing more to apprehend. You will be left to the reproaches of your own conscience: for detestable as your wickedness has been, and consummate as your powers of hypocrisy must likewise be, you still can scarcely escape from the upbraidings of that conscience."

Never in all my life did I behold such a piteous spectacle of crest-fallen self-sufficiency, utter discomfiture, and abject humiliation, as that now presented by the guilty lawyer. The hope which had for a few instants animated his countenance, seemed to have suddenly yielded to the direst apprehension that in spite of the promises given, exposure and ruin were imminent. He trembled from head to foot—he tried to give utterance to a few words of entreaty as he fixed his eyes on me—but they died upon his lips.

"Mr. Wenlock," I said; "the assurances which have been proffered you, are fraught with sincerity. I seek but justice—and not revenge. You shall be spared, sir, if you at once surrender up the genuine document for which you substituted a false one."

"It is not here—it is not here," he replied in a tremulous and broken voice: "it is in my own private office—I will go and fetch it."

"Give me the keys, sir," said Charles Hunter: "and tell me where I shall find it—yes, and the forged instrument likewise. If you yourself stir from this room before the documents are in our possession, it will only be in the keeping of the constables, who will be summoned from outside to take charge of you."

Wenlock thrust one of his trembling hands into his pocket—drew forth a bunch of keys—and gave Mr. Hunter the necessary directions where to find the two wills.

Charles quitted the room; and during his absence, which lasted about five minutes, a profound silence reigned. The guilty lawyer, having sunk down upon a seat, buried his face in his hands; and methought that the sound of more than one subdued sob reached my ears. Armstrong remained wrapped



ap in mournful reflection; while from time to time the Gipsy Queen bent her exultant and congratulatory looks upon me. My own regards expressed the deep gratitude I experienced towards her,—a gratitude that was not unmingled with astonishment at the signal success which had attended the bold course she had adopted. Charles Hunter returned to the room; and I beheld two documents in his hand.

"This is the genuine will," he immediately said, handing me one of the papers: "it is the will which Miss Maitland signed in my presence, and which bears my attesting signature. *This*, sir," he cried, addressing himself to Wenlock as he tossed the second paper indignantly upon the table, "is the forged one. It is for you to destroy in our presence your own precious handiwork!"

"Do it yourself, Hunter—tear it up—burn it—remove it from my sight," said Wenlock, in a bro-

ken voice, as he raised his head from his hands. "How I could have ever done such a thing, I cannot conceive!"

"Then behold!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, as he tore the forged will in halves, and held each piece to the candle that was nearest.

"I say, what is all this about, Wenlock?" cried Theobald Maitland, as at that moment he suddenly burst into the room.

"It means, sir," answered Charles Hunter, "that a forged will is in process of destruction!"

Theobald Maitland staggered back as if smitten with a sudden blow; and his horrible countenance was rendered still more detestably hideous by the ghastly expression which seized upon it. But the next moment he abruptly turned round and hurried from the room,—doubtless thinking that he was not safe there, and that the transition to a station-house would be more easy than agreeable. Almost

immediately afterwards we heard the street-door bang with a violence that shook the entire house, and denoted the excited precipitancy of his flight.

"Miss Price," said Mr. Wenlock, as Charles Hunter threw into the fire-place the burning fragments of the fabricated will, "the destruction of that instrument is a proof that you intend to be merciful towards me—and I thank you—I thank you sincerely! But may I ask something more at your hands? may I venture to entreat that my name may be spared from the shame and exposure—indeed, the utter ruin—that would attend upon the recital of these proceedings elsewhere? May I throw myself upon your mercy also to beseech that you will use your influence with those to whom the transaction is already known——"

"Mr. Wenlock," I answered, interrupting him, "I will take it upon myself to promise that you may make yourself easy in those respects. I repeat, sir, that I am not vindictive: I leave you to your own conscience."

"But this friend of your's?" he said, turning his eyes upon the Gipsy Queen: "and those constables——"

"You have nothing to fear," was Barbauld's immediate response. "Though we are treating you with far more mercy than you deserve—a mercy, indeed, which in itself is almost criminal—yet that mercy shall nevertheless be shown you!"

"But you, Hunter," exclaimed the miserable man, in a tone of piteous appeal,—"what am I to expect at your hands?"

"Mercy, sir—mercy," responded Jemima's husband: "that is what you have to expect! But it must be accompanied with certain conditions. Through your agency I am placed in a responsible situation on behalf of a Public Company: it will be henceforth impossible that you and I can hold any correspondence together. It cannot be expected that I am to suffer through your iniquity, and be compelled to resign my own situation in order to escape from the chance of coming in contact with you in future. It is you who must resign your position as solicitor to that Company. On this condition I place a seal upon my lips."

"I accept it—I accept it," answered Wenlock: "the resignation shall be sent in to-morrow."

"Enough!" observed Hunter: "I rely upon your promise. We may now take our departure."

The Gipsy Queen and myself, Armstrong and Hunter, issued forth from the lawyer's dwelling; and the moment we were in the street, I pressed Barbauld's hand in a manner to convey the full sense of all the gratitude I experienced for what she had done. I could not give utterance to my feelings in words: my emotions overpowered me. Oh, how my position was changed! what a wondrous alteration of circumstances had a few hours wrought in my behalf!—for I held secured about my person a document that was of the value of nearly thirty thousand pounds to me. Was it possible? was it credible?—or was it all a dream? I scarcely remember how I parted from Charles Hunter and Armstrong: my brain was in a whirl with the excitement of mingled wonder and joy. But when I regained some control over my feelings, I found myself seated by Barbauld Azetha's side in the hackney-coach, with the two men in uniforms still

opposite to us. I then had a dim recollection that Hunter and Armstrong were to be at Mr. Longman's office on the following day at noon, in order to assist in the necessary steps to effect the probate of the will—and that I had promised to see that gentleman beforehand, in order to explain everything that had taken place, and urge him to treat the guilty but repentant grocer with a mien of merciful forbearance.

Again did I grasp Barbauld Azetha's hand in fervent gratitude: again did I endeavour to speak a few words in a similar sense—but I could not! She however understood that I meant to convey the full expression of my thankfulness: and she said in a low voice, that displayed more tenderness of emotion than I had ever yet known her to evince, "I feel as happy, dear Mary, at having accomplished this success for you, as if every care which rankles in my own heart had suddenly been removed. But you must exercise a proper control over your feelings: for joy kills as well as grief!"

"Yes—I will tranquillize myself," I answered murmuringly: "the excitement of feeling I have experienced has been indeed very great! But now that I bethink me," I observed, speaking in a less subdued voice, "it is my duty, as it will also be a pleasure, to recompense these officers——"

But here the Gipsy Queen burst into a merry laugh; so that I gazed upon her in surprise, as the lights of the street-lamps flung their rays into the vehicle and showed me how hearty was that merriment on Barbauld's part.

"Why, my dear Mary," she said, "have you up to the present moment continued to believe that these were real officers?"

For an instant I was perfectly astounded by the question: but the next moment it became a revelation—and I comprehended that the men seated opposite were two of Barbauld Azetha's own people.

"Now you understand," she continued, "what I meant by telling you in the first instance that the stroke to be played was a bold one; and perhaps you will think that I was prudent in not being more explicit with you,—inasmuch as your fears would have made you hesitate, and probably reject the scheme altogether. I saw, Mary, that you had a pack of crafty villains to deal with; and at the same time I knew that no magistrate would grant a warrant to apprehend them upon mere grounds of suspicion. So I thought that a couple of my own faithful people, duly dressed up as you behold them, would be enabled to strike sudden terror into the heart of one of the malefactors. The result has justified my calculation. But as for these men accepting any reward from your purse, it shall not be so."

"Nay, my dear Barbauld, I must insist upon it! You will offend me if you do not allow me to have my own way in this respect."

"And you will offend me much more, Mary," she rejoined, "if you do persevere. But it will be useless: for when once the word has gone forth from my lips, my people will obey."

I said no more—but secretly resolved to take some means of evincing my gratitude towards the Gipsy Queen and her two confederates in the plot of this memorable evening. We reached Conduit Street: she would not enter the house to take any

refreshment—for it was late, being past midnight. I bade her an affectionate farewell. I expressed my thanks in the warmest terms to the two men—and the hackney-coach drove away with them. Mrs. Chaplin, who had grown very uneasy at my protracted absence, was sitting up for me; but when I communicated the nature of the evening's expedition, and its result, the kind-hearted woman embraced me with the liveliest testimonies of joy.

I slept but little that night: it was an excess of bliss which thus banished slumber from my pillow;—and yet I rejoiced not in the possession of a fortune on my own account: the elysian feelings that swelled my heart, were all excited by the thought of what that wealth would enable me to do.

CHAPTER CXLV.

MY FORTUNE.

WHEN I rose from my couch in the morning, I immediately sent a messenger with a note to William, communicating what had occurred on the previous evening. I then wrote a still more detailed narrative to Mrs. Kingston, and made haste to send it as a coach-parcel, so that it might reach the Grange in the evening of the same day: for if forwarded through the post, it would not have arrived at its destination until the following morning—and I was naturally anxious that not an hour should be unnecessarily wasted ere my good friends in Kent received the happy tidings of the issue of the will case.

At eleven o'clock I proceeded to Mr. Longman's office, and the surprise of that gentleman, when I placed the genuine will in his hands, may be easily imagined. I frankly and candidly explained to him how it had been recovered; and he listened in silent astonishment. But when I had concluded, he grasped my hand cordially, and proffered the sincerest congratulations.

"At the same time," he added, in a good-humoured manner, "I really don't know what would become of us lawyers, if all our clients possessed friends in the shape of Gipsy Queens to conduct their business in this summary style. To speak seriously however, I *am* unfeignedly glad at the result; and as you particularly wish it, I will not breathe a single word that may add to the shame and self-reproach of this man Armstrong when he makes his appearance."

Precisely at twelve o'clock Mr. Hunter and Armstrong arrived at the office; and a coach being called, we proceeded with the lawyer to Doctors' Commons, to pass through the necessary forms for proving the will. When these were accomplished, we returned to Mr. Longman's office, where Armstrong took an opportunity to say a few words to me aside. He thanked me for the forbearance and mercy which had been shown him—assured me that he never should have become an accomplice in such a tremendous fraud, had not the necessities of the moment placed him so completely in Wenlock's power—and vowed that the whole transaction was a warning and a lesson which he should never forget. I expressed a hope that it would prove so; and, with renewed expressions of gratitude, he took

his departure. Mr. Longman, not requiring my presence any more that day, I left the office, accompanied by Mr. Hunter. We walked together as far as my lodgings; and he told me that he proposed leaving London again by the night-coach, as he was anxious to get back into Wales to put his wife out of suspense as to what the business was for which he had been so urgently addressed through the medium of public advertisements. I intimated that it was my intention to write to Jemima, and asked him from which coach-office he purposed to take his departure, that I might send thither the communication wherewith I proposed to charge him. He named the place; and we separated. I proceeded into Bond Street, and made some handsome purchases of plate and other solid valuables, which I designed as a present to Jemima, and at the same time as a testimonial of my gratitude towards her husband for his conduct in the transaction of the previous night, and also to indemnify him for his expense and trouble in coming to London, as I did not choose to risk offending him by a direct pecuniary offer. I wrote a kind letter to Jemima—made up my parcel—and got Mrs. Chaplin herself to take it to the coach-office, so that there might be no mistake as to its safely reaching Mr. Hunter's hands when he should call there.

In the afternoon of the following day Mr. and Mrs. Kingston arrived at my lodgings. I need hardly say that they were rejoiced at the speedy and unexpected issue of a business the first complexion of which had been unpleasant to a degree. The Squire made me tell him all over again the particulars of the narrative which I had already forwarded by letter; and he declared that it was the cleverest as well as the most legitimate trick that he had ever known to be played. He and Mrs. Kingston dined with me at my lodgings—William joined us in the evening—and the party would have been altogether a happy one, were it not that we could not possibly touch on the will case without having the image of the deceased Laura mournfully conjured up before us.

On the following day the Kingstons and I accompanied Mr. Longman to the Bank of England, that the money might be transferred to our names. I must here observe that the total amount of Laura's funded property amounted, in round numbers, to thirty-five thousand pounds: the legacy duty was three thousand five hundred, which had to be paid to the Government: the disposable residue was therefore thirty-one thousand five hundred. When the formularies were completed and the clerk was about to enter the transfers, Mr. Kingston said in a decisive manner, "You will not only make over to Miss Price's name the sum to which she is entitled, but likewise that to which I have proved my own claim on behalf of my wife."

"No, Mr. Kingston," I said, in an earnest manner, "it is impossible! I cannot accept this bounty! I am already indebted to you and your dear lady in an amount of obligations which I can never repay."

"Then, all I can say is," answered the Squire, "that you will be treating us with the utmost ingratitude if you don't let us have our own way."

Still I remonstrated: but the Squire was positive—Mrs. Kingston was equally determined—and I

was at last compelled to yield. The sum of thirty thousand five hundred pounds was accordingly transferred to my name in the books of the Bank of England. Mr. Kingston took possession of the thousand pounds, wherewith to pay the legacies bequeathed to the maid (whom his wife, it should be observed, had taken into her service) and the physician at whose asylum Laura had resided after the unhappy incidents in Guernsey. From the Bank we proceeded to the private bankers of our deceased friend; and there we found three hundred pounds standing to her account. This sum the Kingstons and I decided upon presenting to Mr. Longman for his services, and as an indemnity for the loss of a case which would have proved lucrative to him if protracted by legal process, instead of being brought to so summary an issue by Barbauld Azetha's expedient.

Laura's will had left me sole executrix; and thus I was possessed of her personal property in addition to the immense sum of money already spoken of. Her plate and jewellery had all become mine, as well as the house and furniture in Guernsey: the house at Hammersmith, as the reader may recollect, was hired ready-furnished. I besought and entreated Mrs. Kingston to accept the jewellery of her deceased cousin; and she agreed,—observing that she thus gave her consent for the two-fold purpose of avoiding unnecessary pain to me by refusal, and that she might hold some mementoes of poor Laura. Mr. Longman received instructions to give up the house at Hammersmith and dismiss all the servants, each with a very liberal present—the means for which I supplied him.

Mr. and Mrs. Kingston had taken up their quarters at an hotel; and when our business-proceedings were over, I dined with them there. After dinner Mrs. Kingston sought an opportunity of speaking to me alone; and she asked what plans I had in view?—expressing likewise the hope that I would accompany herself and husband back to the Grange, and make it my home for as long a time as I thought fit.

"My dear Mrs. Kingston," I answered, with a flush upon my cheeks—for I knew full well that, though she spoke with delicate reserve, she was thinking of Eustace Quentin, "I so far accept your kind invitation that I will join you at the Grange in the course of a few days: but for the present I must remain a little longer in London—and—and—I will explain to you——"

"Whenever you choose thus to explain your plans, dear Mary," she interrupted me, "you shall do so—and not before. God grant that the fullest measure of happiness may await you, my dearest girl!"—and she embraced me affectionately.

On the following day Mr. and Mrs. Kingston took their departure; and I wrote a note to William, requesting him to come to me immediately. This was at about ten o'clock in the morning; and while the messenger was gone, I went out to purchase some handsome presents which I intended for the Gipsy Queen. These I despatched to the house in St. Giles's by the messenger, when he returned from his former errand. It was near mid-day when William made his appearance; and bidding him sit down by my side on the sofa in my drawing-room, I looked him full in the face,—saying, "My dear brother, I am now possessed of thirty thousand

pounds and upwards. Is there any particular use to which your own heart would suggest that I ought to appropriate this sum?"

"Yes, dear Mary," he at once replied. "You must extricate from his difficulties *him* who has fallen into them wholly and entirely on your account!"

"My own dear, dear brother," I murmuringly answered, "nothing less than this response did I expect from you!"—and throwing myself into his arms, I embraced him tenderly.

"Come," he said, "dear Mary—let us lose no time: it must be done to-day!"

"Yes—to-day, William," I answered: then after a few moments' pause, I asked, "Think you that his liberation can be effected to-day?"

"Most assuredly—I have no doubt of it," responded William. "Fortunately we are acquainted with the name of his solicitor—he mentioned it when we called the other day—and we will proceed to that gentleman's office at once."

I was not long in putting on my things: and, Oh! how my heart bounded within me at the thought of what I was about to do, and of the prospect of beholding my well-beloved Eustace at liberty ere the day should have passed! On descending the stairs with William, I stepped for a few moments into Mrs. Chaplin's room to give her certain little instructions; and then I issued forth with my brother. We entered a hackney-coach, and at once proceeded to the office of Mr. Masters, Captain Quentin's solicitor. This was in the City; and we were fortunate in finding him there, and disengaged. We were shown into his private office, and found him to be a middle-aged man, with a sedate look and taciturn disposition. Indeed, on a farther acquaintance, he proved to be a person of very few words—without any undue curiosity—and altogether of prompt business-like habits.

"I believe, sir," said William, who acted as spokesman, "that you are in possession of a list of the liabilities of Captain Quentin?"

"I am so," was the response.

"Would you favour me with the list?"

"Yes—if you will tell me for what purpose."

"To liquidate those debts."

"Very good," said the lawyer. "But are you aware that they are considerable?"

"We are given to understand," returned William, "that they amount to about twenty-seven thousand pounds."

"A little more," rejoined Mr. Masters: "and with costs and expenses, it will take twenty-seven thousand five hundred to cover them. But here is the list."

"I perceive," said William, after looking over it, "that some of the creditors are at Liverpool: how are they to be settled with?"

"Their agents are in London," responded Masters; "and the settlement can be effected within the same hour that the money is forthcoming."

"In that case," replied William, "the money shall be forthcoming within the hour that is passing."

"Good," said Mr. Masters. "But pardon me for suggesting that some little compromise might perhaps be effected, if negotiations were prudently opened."

"No, sir," I now chimed in: "not the compro-

nise of a single shilling! Everything must be paid in full."

"And Captain Quentin," added William, "must leave his present place of detention under circumstances of the highest honour."

"He will assuredly do so," remarked the lawyer, "if his liabilities be thus discharged in full."

"And his release can be effected to-day?" asked William.

"To-day—within a few hours," rejoined Masters: and, Oh! what a thrill of joy shot through my heart at this intelligence! But it was instantaneously succeeded by such a sensation of faintness, that I felt as if about to fall off the chair on which I was seated. It however passed away,—but leaving behind, for a few minutes, the swimming giddiness of excessive joy.

William now explained to Mr. Masters that the money would have to be sold out of the funds; whereupon he at once proposed to take us to his own stock-broker, who would accomplish the transaction in a very short space. We accompanied him to a dingy office in Tokenhouse Yard, at the back of the Bank of England; and the stock-broker being there, we all proceeded straight to the Bank itself. The whole process of selling out twenty-seven thousand five hundred pounds did not occupy more than half-an-hour; and I bade William take charge of the money. Now I felt convinced that Eustace did indeed stand upon the threshold of freedom: there was nothing to prevent his emancipation! I had feared the starting-up of some unexpected obstacle—the presence of some unforeseen cause of delay:—in short, under such circumstances, even though with an apparent certainty before one, these painful misgivings and anxious doubts do invariably occur. But they were past—they were gone: the money was in our possession—and Eustace would be free! By one stroke of my pen I had suddenly reduced myself from great wealth to comparative poverty: I had but about three thousand pounds left;—and yet heaven knows that so far from costing me a single pang thus to divest myself of the bulk of my fortune, it was with unspeakable delight—with a bliss truly elysian—that I made the sacrifice, if such it could be called.

We issued forth from the Bank of England. The solicitor for the agents of the Liverpool shipowners lived close by: we proceeded thither—Mr. Masters promptly explained our business—the money was paid—and thus the first step was taken towards the accomplishment of our purpose. We went round to the other creditors, one after the other in due succession. There were not many—for the amount owing to each was large: and by four o'clock on that afternoon every debt was paid—every liability settled—the receipts were in our possession. As a matter of course I do not herein include the sum owing to Mr. Crawford, that being altogether a friendly affair between him and Eustace, and not appearing in Mr. Masters' list.

"We have now nothing more to do," said Mr. Masters, "but to proceed to the King's Bench and lodge the discharges in the clerks' office there. Those discharges will have to be verified: but the clerks will take my word for their accuracy, and will not detain Captain Quentin a single minute."

The hackney-coach in which we were seated, rolled over London Bridge in the direction of the

prison; and the nearer we drew to that establishment, the more violent became the flutterings of my heart. I do not know that in all my life I had hitherto experienced such strong emotions,—all the stronger, too, because I was compelled to coerce and conceal them as much as possible from the attorney's observation. The distance was short; but it seemed to consist of miles. Oh, how slowly the vehicle appeared to go! I longed to travel with the swiftness of thought itself, that Eustace might not pass a moment longer than was absolutely necessary in that dreadful place. At length I beheld its high gloomy wall crowned with revolving iron spikes: the coach passed under that wall—the prison-gates were reached.

"Here," said Mr. Masters, as we alighted from the vehicle, "I shall take my leave of you. My business lies in that office yonder; and when it is completed, I must make the best of my way back to my own chambers. I leave to you the pleasure of announcing to Captain Quentin that he is free."

This was the longest speech that had emanated from the lawyer's lips during the four hours we had been in his company. He shook us both by the hand—we thanked him for his kindness (his own bill of costs was already paid)—and taking William's arm, I entered the prison. Oh, not *this* time did I experience sorrow on setting foot within its walls! not *this* time did my heart tighten as I passed by those turnkeys seated by the huge doors! There was a lightness in that heart which gave elasticity to my steps; and yet it was fluttering like a bird newly caught and put into a cage. As we passed on towards the staircase in which Captain Quentin's room was situated, I felt as if I were walking in a dream—but a dream the light of which was shed from Paradise! It was an intoxication of the senses—an ecstasy of feeling that made the brain swim and whirl with its excess. The staircase was reached: I could not immediately ascend it—I leant against the iron railings for support—a faintness was now coming over me. But I was recalled to myself by the voice of William speaking kindly and encouragingly in my ears, and bidding me not sink beneath the weight of too much joy. Again I took his arm; and we mounted the staircase. The door of Captain Quentin's chamber was reached: that overpowering sensation had gone away—the wild thrill of ineffable joy was once more quickening through me. And my heart—Oh! how it palpitated—how it palpitated, during the few moments that elapsed after William had knocked at that door!

It opened—and a cry of joy burst from Quentin's lips on beholding us: for he had not expected that we should return so soon again—much less at that hour in the evening. He caught me in his arms: I endeavoured to speak a few words to tell him that he was free—but I could not. Again was I overpowered by the strength of my feelings: a faintness was coming over me—I was sick with the excess of my own heart's happiness. Consciousness abandoned me!

When I came to myself, I was seated on a chair: William was standing on one side holding my hand—Eustace was kneeling on the other, and covering with kisses and with tears the hand that he was pressing to his lips.

"Oh, my beloved Mary—angel of my heart!" he exclaimed, in tones of rapturous feeling: "how

can I ever prove my gratitude—how demonstrate my love? Heavens! I am lost in amazement at all this. In loving you, it is not a mere being of earth to whom I have paid my adoration: it is an angel whom I have worshipped!"

He caught me in his arms—he embraced me again and again—I gave back the kisses which he left upon my lips. Oh, the ineffable joy of that moment! The tears ran down my cheeks: but they were tears of bliss that it does one good to shed.

"Mary," continued Eustace, in a voice broken and tremulous with his own almost overpowering emotions, "there is no amount of love which the human heart is capable of knowing, that I do not experience for you. Oh! words are wanting to express all I *do* feel!—would to heaven that I knew some other language in order to convey it! My parents discarded me—my brother would have left me to perish in a gaol—but you, Mary—*you*, the angel of my life,—*you* deserted me not!"

He stopped short: he covered his face with his hands—he wept and sobbed with the violence of his feelings. At length he grew calmer: we embraced again—the tears were still upon our cheeks—but we smiled through them; and the light of that smile on the countenance of my well-beloved was serenely joyous, as the sunbeams that shine through an April shower. William was profoundly affected; and it was through the dimness of his own tears that he contemplated the scene.

There was a knock at the door: we all three hastily wiped our eyes, as a turnkey entered to announce to Captain Quentin that he was free and might take his departure at any moment he thought fit. The preparations of Eustace were speedily made. The turnkey took his portmanteau—and we issued forth from that prison-chamber. I leant upon the arm of my lover: for such I felt that I had a right not merely to denominate but also to regard him *now*;—and as we passed along towards the door of the gaol, we every moment exchanged the tenderest looks and the happiest smiles. At length the outer gate was passed—and Eustace Quentin breathed the air of freedom.

We entered the hackney-coach—a guinea from William's hand sent the turnkey rejoicing away—and the vehicle drove from the precincts of the prison. It had ere now seemed a long, long journey from the City to that gaol: but how wondrously short appeared the distance from thence to Conduit Street—and yet it was in reality almost three times the length of the former. But we were so happy inside that coach—Eustace, William, and I,—Oh! so happy, that the time flew as if on eagle-pinions. We had so many things to say—so much to talk of—and yet the very ecstasy of our delight made our discourse confused and our thoughts a delirium. It was seven o'clock when the coach stopped at Mrs. Chaplin's; and Eustace ascended with me and William to my drawing-room. A few minutes afterwards the servant announced that dinner was served up; and we passed into the dining-parlour. Mrs. Chaplin had well fulfilled those *certain instructions* that I gave her when issuing forth at mid-day: she had provided an excellent repast—to which I fear, however, that full justice was scarcely done; for the hearts of all three were too full of joy to leave scope for appetite.

That was one of the happiest evenings of my life. As I write of it now, there is a gush of emotions in my heart—my feelings appear to swell up into my very throat—the tears brim in my eyes. Oh! the light of happiness was upon the countenance of him whom I loved: it was a happiness too that was unalloyed, because he felt and knew that the circumstances of a few short hours had shattered into fragments the adamantine barrier which his father's dying injunctions had for a period raised up between us.

When he took his leave in company with William, at about eleven o'clock, he asked permission to call on me at noon on the ensuing day. The look that I gave him was a response in the affirmative: he went away happy with my noble-hearted brother; and I retired to my couch to enjoy the sweetest slumber and the most blissful dreams that I had ever known.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

EUSTACE AND HIS BROTHER.

It was not much more than half-past eleven on the following day when Eustace Quentin made his appearance. His impatience to see me would not suffer him to wait until the appointed hour: but he read in my looks that he had not come too soon. How handsome did he appear to me, with the light of joy again beaming in his eyes and animating his countenance! Even the few short hours of freedom that he had experienced, seemed to have worked wonders in his behalf. When William and I had called upon him in the prison some days back, he had appeared pale and careworn: all traces of such sorrow had now vanished—for happiness is a panacea which no physician's remedies can equal, nor even approach.

We sat down together: he took my hand—and gazing with devoted fondness upon my countenance, he said, "Beloved Mary, under existing circumstances it may seem indelicate on my part to make even the slightest allusion to that topic which is nearest my heart: but it is only one word that I crave from your lips—one single word, to convince me that the happiness which fills my soul is not a dream!"

He paused: and then a mournful expression appeared upon his countenance as he glanced down at his own mourning garments and likewise looked at mine.

"I have lately lost a parent," he continued, "and you a dear friend whom you loved as a sister: and therefore am I well aware that the day for crowning that happiness which is to be confirmed by a single syllable from your lips, must be postponed for some time yet. But this word, dearest Mary, that I wish you to speak—it is to tell me whether you consider yourself free *now*, to promise me your hand? whether, without scruple, you think yourself justified in saying that you will some short time hence accompany me to the altar? Oh! do not hesitate to speak that word, angel of my heart! Why should you? The hand of Providence is in all that has occurred: heaven itself has sent you a fortune even exceeding the amount specified in my father's will. My brother can on no pretence—with no possibility of excuse—

withhold from me my own fortune; and we shall be rich—we shall be rich, my beloved one—and happy indeed will be the day on which you will permit me to lay that fortune of mine at your feet! Now, dearest, do you hesitate to speak the word that will confirm all my hopes of happiness?"

No—I did not hesitate: I would have spoken it before, but that my feelings had absorbed the power of utterance. But I murmured it now; and Eustace Quentin, throwing himself at my feet, pressed my hand to his lips and expressed himself in the most enraptured terms. Then he rose up, and walked to and fro in the room, exclaiming, "It appears a dream—all a dream; and yet it is a bright and joyous reality! Oh, that one's happiness should be so immense as to engender the suspicion that it is a mere phantom!"

Then he hurried back to me again—he seated himself by my side—he took my hand, and said the fondest and tenderest things that his loving heart could send up to his lips. To use a common phrase, he was almost beside himself with joy: it was a delirium—a species of intoxication of the brain, which made his head swim with delight. I gave him to understand, gently and delicately, that one year must elapse before our nuptials could be celebrated,—so that he might decently and properly fulfil the period of mourning for his parent. To this he acquiesced,—declaring that now the barrier which his father had raised up had been so wondrously and providentially broken down, and that I had no longer any scruple in renewing our engagement, he was perfectly happy: he had no fears for the future, and could endure the delay with comparative patience. I then proceeded to inform him of what my own plans were, and to which I hoped he would agree;—namely, that I should reside for the year that was to elapse with my kind friends the Kingstons. His countenance grew somewhat mournful; and he asked if he might not be permitted to repair into Kent, and fix his abode either at Walmer or Deal, so that we might constantly see each other? Could I say nay? what objection could I offer? None! And his looks brightened again.

These things being settled, Eustace declared he would go off and see his brother at once,—repeating his former remark, that there could not now be any possible reason wherefore his fortune should be withheld from him. He accordingly left me for that purpose; and hastening to Wilberton House in Piccadilly, found his brother at home. The interview which took place between them I propose to describe in detail—which I am fully enabled to do, inasmuch as at the time I write it I am assisted by Eustace himself. Thus, though I was not an eye-witness of that interview, I have the means of depicting it with the minutest accuracy of detail.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when Eustace reached the mansion in Piccadilly; and the domestics, who were lounging in the hall, testified the most heartfelt pleasure at beholding him:—for, as it appeared, his brother had made no secret of the circumstance that his imprisonment for debt had prevented him from attending at his mother's funeral. The steward especially demonstrated his delight as much as he dared or thought it delicate to do. Lord Wilberton was at luncheon when

Eustace was introduced into his presence; and without a single word of greeting, or the slightest syllable of welcome, he only said, with some degree of surprise, "Ah! you have managed to get out of limbo—have you?"

"Yes, Ferdinand—I am free," responded Eustace, extending his hand to his brother, who however only accepted it coldly. "Doubtless you are astonished to see me at large, considering the enormous amount of liabilities for which I was incarcerated?"

"I suppose your creditors did not think it worth while to detain you any longer?" remarked his brother: "for of course you have not paid them."

"Every shilling of those liabilities is liquidated," replied Eustace: then taking a seat, he added, "But it will perhaps be a still greater subject of surprise for you, when I tell you how this has been brought about. I am no sanctimonious hypocrite nor half-mad fanatic: but I cannot help thinking that Providence itself interposed on behalf of those circumstances which have developed themselves in a way to ensure my happiness."

"Providence indeed! But no matter," said Lord Wilberton: "go on with your story."

"The name of Miss Price is not unknown to you," continued Eustace; "and——"

"The name is odious to me," cried Ferdinand angrily: "and you are aware of it! In heaven's name, Eustace, give up those follies which have led you into such terrible dilemmas——"

"If to love a virtuous, an amiable, and a beautiful young woman, be a folly," responded Captain Quentin, seriously and proudly, "then indeed may I be taxed with the very greatest of follies!"

"But why do you come to talk to me about this Mary Price of your's?" asked Lord Wilberton. "You don't mean me to understand that she has discovered a treasure and paid your debts for you?"

"My dear brother," answered Eustace, "I should esteem it a kindness if you would abandon this half-indifferent, half-contemptuous tone which you are adopting towards me. If you have no fraternal feeling in my favour, at least study to treat me with the courtesy due to a gentleman,—because, all brother though you be, I cannot permit myself to be regarded as some wretched menial inferior."

"If you come to me, Eustace, in what I call a proper spirit, I shall treat you as you deserve," returned Lord Wilberton. "But if you are going to fling the detested name of Mary Price at me, the sooner our interview ends the better. I must remind you that you were disobedient to your father and disobedient to your mother: you must recollect that you are now in the presence of your elder brother; so that if you wish to receive kindness at my hands, don't talk to me of Mary Price."

"Certain circumstances have transpired," responded Eustace, "which render it absolutely necessary that I should speak to you of Miss Price. First, however, in my own justification I must observe that my conscience absolves me from any wilful or wicked disobedience towards our deceased parents. In respect to Miss Price, I will at once inform you that she has just inherited a fortune of thirty thousand five hundred pounds in funded property, besides a small estate in Guernsey——"

"The deuce she has!" ejaculated Lord Wilberton.

"Surely, Eustace, you don't think I shall believe this cock-and-bull story?"

"Ferdinand, I have never yet told a falsehood," replied Eustace, haughtily and angrily: "and I beg that you will not repeat such an accusation. Mr. Longman, a highly respectable solicitor, can give you the fullest information upon this subject; and Mr. Masters, my own attorney, can satisfy you that to the noble generosity of Miss Price am I indebted for my freedom. You reproached me just now, Ferdinand, with disobedience to my father and mother: if I were inclined to retaliate in the form of upbraiding, I might observe that my own brother left me to perish in a gaol—not even so much as taking the trouble to inquire whether I possessed the means to procure the bare necessities of life, and put myself into decent mourning for my poor mother's death—while Mary Price, an angel of generosity, of constancy, and of love, lost not a moment after she became an heiress in throwing open the prison-doors for my emancipation. O Ferdinand! surely you cannot remain insensible to the conduct of this admirable young lady!"

"Lady, indeed!" echoed the young nobleman contemptuously: "who made her a lady?"

"Her own merits," responded Eustace. "The Sovereign may bestow a title upon the veriest wanton and thus give her rank: but the best elevation is that which is self-accomplished by means of rectitude and virtue. Mary Price has raised herself from the humblest position to be the companion, the associate, and the friend of persons of wealth and station. The Earl and Countess of Chilstone regard her as such—Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, representing one of the oldest and richest families in Kent, look upon her as a sister——"

"Well, well, I knew all that beforehand—Mary Price took very good care to blazon forth her splendid friendships when she called upon me the other day. But you had better come at once, Eustace," added Lord Wilborton, "to the object of your visit."

"I will explain myself in as few words as possible," answered Captain Quentin; "although I should have thought that it would scarcely be difficult for you to foresee my purpose. But it appears that I must circumstantially remind you that our late uncle, Sir Thomas Wilborton, bequeathed in trust the sum of sixty thousand pounds, to devolve upon me under certain conditions. Those conditions were that any marriage I might contract should be with the full consent of my parents. Now, our late father solemnly enjoined that I should contract no marriage save and except with some lady possessed of a fortune in her own right of at least thirty thousand pounds. His last will and testament instructed our deceased mother to yield her assent to a marriage contracted under the conditions thus imposed. Therefore, Ferdinand, it must be held that inasmuch as Miss Price has inherited a fortune of more than thirty thousand pounds, my alliance with her is in strict accordance with our deceased parents' stipulations and wishes; and as you are their living representative, I have to request that at your convenience you will acknowledge my right to receive the fortune bequeathed to me by our uncle Sir Thomas Wilborton."

"You have put the matter, Eustace, in a perfectly business-like way," replied Lord Wilborton;

"and I will answer you in the same strain. Know, then, that it can only be by the most equivocal interpretation of our deceased parents' wishes that you could contract any such marriage as the one you contemplate. You cannot possibly lay your hand upon your heart and proclaim ignorance of the fact that our father's dying injunctions were expressly levelled against your union with Miss Price. Of course, our father was not indelicate enough to introduce this young person's name into those instructions: but their meaning is too obvious to be mistaken. It was not so much against her want of fortune at the time, as against her social position that the objections entertained by our parents arose. In the ordinary course of things it seemed utterly improbable that Miss Price would ever become the heiress to such a fortune as thirty thousand pounds; and therefore our father naturally conceived that by the conditions he imposed, your alliance with Miss Price would become impossible,—save and except in utter violation of his dying mandate. In a word, therefore, it is only by the most wretched quibbling that you can otherwise interpret the wishes of our father, and which have likewise been ratified by the last will and testament of our mother."

"I will not deny, Ferdinand," responded Eustace, "that I comprehend full well the aim which our father had in view when he dictated his injunctions. But are they not of the cruellest character towards myself? and have I not a right to avail myself of any loophole through which to escape from their influence? Neither in law nor in justice can you, Ferdinand, discover the slightest ground for withholding my fortune from me. Therefore, in the name of the law I claim it—in the name of justice I claim it—and I claim it also from one who will scarcely venture to become the persecutor of his own brother."

"Stop! you are proceeding too fast, Eustace!" exclaimed Ferdinand, with a malignant smile. "You speak of law. Well then, have law if you will. But the law will tell you that according to the terms of the late Sir Thomas Wilborton's bequest, your fortune is only to be paid to you *on the day of your marriage*, and not beforehand. I suppose you are not yet married to Miss Price—I hope not for decency's sake; inasmuch as your mother is scarcely cold in her grave."

"Even if I had been indelicate enough to urge so speedy a union after such an event," responded Eustace, indignantly, "Miss Price would have firmly and resolutely refused to accompany me so soon to the altar. But I certainly thought, Ferdinand, that as you have it in your power to put me in possession of my fortune at any moment you choose——"

"I have *not* that power," interrupted Lord Wilborton: "the terms of Sir Thomas's bequest are positive. I remember them well. They are to the effect that the specified sum is to be paid over to you on the day of your marriage, such marriage taking place with the full consent of your parents, or their heir—in short, with the consent of the head of the family. It will be time enough for you to come to me on the day of your marriage: but I tell you very candidly that if Miss Price be the *lady*—accentuating the term—"whom you choose as your wife, I will *not* put you in possession of Sir



Thomas Wilberton's bequest. You may go to law—and I will fight you to the last. We shall have a Chancery suit: and who, do you think, will gain it, the man possessing ample means to conduct it, or the man who is penniless when entering upon it? Besides, I give you due notice that all the tedious delays which proceedings in Chancery admit, shall be obtained—no money shall be spared to render the process as costly to yourself as possible. And observe! a costly Chancery suit will be ruinous to you. It may be protracted for twenty years; and at the end of that time, even if you gain it, your fortune would be swallowed up in expenses. Now you understand me—and we need say no more."

"Ferdinand, is it possible that I hear aright?" exclaimed Eustace, astounded, and almost horrified at these unfeeling remarks—these bitter threats. "From a stranger such menaces would be dreadful: from a brother they are downright incredible! No,

Ferdinand—you cannot mean what you say! It would be to proclaim at once that all the bonds of fraternity are severed between us—that you ignore me as a brother—you constitute yourself as my enemy—although, as heaven is my witness, I would not by taking a hostile attitude in return, accept you as a foe! No—perish the sixty thousand pounds, rather than that the world should be scandalized by so hideous a spectacle as one brother fighting against the other!—and even if you were heartless and cruel enough to put your threat into execution, I would not furnish you the opportunity of becoming so wicked. Better tell me at once, Ferdinand, that you covet my fortune in addition to your own; and I will surrender it up to you. But I again take heaven to witness that I will not go to law and thus enable you to play so detestable a part!"

"This language is all very fine, Eustace," said

Lord Wilberton, rising from his seat: "but it makes no impression upon me. You can take your own course. Renounce Mary Price—and all shall be well: we become brothers once more. But if you adhere to your folly in respect to her, we shall continue strangers—No, not strangers—because you shall have me as your enemy."

With these words Lord Wilberton rang the bell and turned to quit the room. Eustace, profoundly affected by his brother's unfeeling conduct, sprang towards him; and catching him by the arm, exclaimed, "For heaven's sake let us not part thus! Once more I say, perish my own fortune if you will!—or take it all unto yourself: but do not, do not tell *me*—your own brother—that henceforth we are to be strangers; or, what is far worse, and far more terrible, that you will become my enemy."

"Unhand me, sir—attempt not to detain me!" said Ferdinand, laughingly. "If you persist in this folly with respect to Mary Price, you are no brother of mine."

"But who gives you the power, Ferdinand," exclaimed Eustace, in a tone of earnest remonstrance, "to break at one moment the links of brotherhood on some pretext, and re-unite them the next moment on another? God alone could do this: and you are arrogating to yourself the high prerogative of divinity. Ah! and what is more—though you, Ferdinand, may thus undertake on your own behalf to crush the natural feelings of the soul; you cannot do so for me. You are my brother—and you cannot unmake yourself from what nature has made you."

"This is absurd!" exclaimed Lord Wilberton, with haughty scorn: and bursting from the grasp in which Eustace had still retained him, he quitted the room.

Eustace returned to me after this interview with his brother; and though I was much distressed to behold the mournfulness of his countenance, yet I frankly admit the result was in no way different from what I had anticipated. Nevertheless, when he had left me to call in Piccadilly, I did not choose to throw a damp upon his spirits by sinister presagings: now, however, I told him at once that I had from the first foreseen the harsh and unkind treatment he would have to experience.

"Do not make yourself unhappy, dearest Eustace," I said, in the most endearing manner; for his distress afflicted me profoundly. "And now listen to what I have to say. I have three thousand pounds left in the funds: the sale of the little estate in Guernsey will, as I am given to understand, produce about fifteen hundred more: I have a sufficiency of ready money to last me for a year:—therefore I shall not draw upon those resources. You must permit me to make all over to you: on the interest thereof you can live, dear Eustace—it will suffice for *one*—because in due course it will have to suffice for *two*."

"Mary—angel that you are!" he exclaimed, pressing me to his heart, "do you think that I would consent to live in idleness upon your funds? No, dearest girl—not for a moment! For heaven's sake do not press this point: I could not assent to it. But a thought has struck me—and there is one way in which you could be serviceable to me—and I know

that you will. The Earl of Chilstone might procure me a Government situation——"

"Oh! I am convinced, my dear Eustace," I replied, "that the Earl will do everything in his power. I had purposed to pay Langham Hall a visit to-morrow, and to remain two or three days there previous to returning into Kent. I will speak to the Earl upon the subject."

"Yes—it must be so," said Eustace, heaving a profound sigh: "for my brother's conduct has dashed to the ground the fond hope I had entertained of fixing my abode near you until the period of our marriage. But after all," he added, with a brightening-up of his countenance, "it will be far better that I should obtain a situation under existing circumstances—so that, when united, we may eat bread which shall be the fruit of my own industry as well as the produce of your private resources. For, alas! Mary, the hope of obtaining my fortune has vanished altogether: I have nothing to expect at the hands of my brother!"

"However slender our means, dear Eustace," I replied, "when once we are united no more to part, we shall be happy. It is not wealth that will contribute to our felicity."

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed rapturously: "a cottage with you, my beloved Mary, in preference to a palace with another!"

CHAPTER CXLVII.

DEPARTURE FROM LONDON.

ON the following day I proceeded by a public conveyance to Langham Hall, and was most kindly welcomed by the noble owners of that splendid mansion. I need not say that my sister Jane was delighted to see me; and on my side I was both proud and rejoiced to observe that she was improving as much in mind as in person. She was becoming exceedingly handsome; and she profited well by the advantages she enjoyed for intellectual culture as well as for feminine accomplishments. Lord Egerton's demeanour towards me was that of a very sincere friend; and I was pleased to behold that there was less awkwardness and embarrassment on his part when he addressed me, than there was at Brighton: he was evidently exerting all his moral power to triumph over a hopeless affection.

I will not pause to describe the vastness or the splendour of Langham Hall—nor the extent and beauty of the grounds attached to it: suffice it to say that it was one of the most magnificent as well as picturesque country-seats belonging to the English nobility. But this however I will add,—that the condition of the tenantry and peasantry upon Lord Chilstone's estate contrasted most favourably with that of those on the adjacent domains; and throughout the entire property the Earl's name was mentioned with veneration and love. With these incidental remarks, I will hasten on to state that it was on the second day after my arrival that I took an opportunity of speaking alone to the Countess in respect to Captain Quentin. I explained to her everything which had recently occurred in connexion with him; and I besought her, if the request were not indiscreet, that she would induce her husband to use his influence in

procuring him a Government situation. The Countess paid me some kind compliments in respect to my conduct towards Eustace—and assured me that nothing would give the Earl greater pleasure than to fulfil my desire. I remained four days at Langham Hall; and when I took my departure, the Earl of Chilstone gave me a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, which he requested me to forward to that high official immediately on my return to London. When once more at my lodgings in Conduit Street, I sent word to Eustace to let him know that I had come back; and he was soon with me. I told him of my success in respect to my application to the Earl through the medium of the Countess; and he testified his gratitude in the most affectionate manner. He himself set off to the Treasury with the letter for the Minister; and I promised to remain yet a few days longer in London to see if it produced an early and a satisfactory result.

On the day after my return I got Eustace to accompany me to call at Sunbeam Villa, in the hope that Mrs. Summery might possibly have come home from Essex; and we found that she had arrived on the previous evening. She was delighted to see us, and insisted that we should pass the day with her—which we did. She assured me that Sybilla often spoke of me,—cherishing towards me an undying friendship; and I promised to go down into Essex and see her before I left London.

When I returned to my lodgings in the evening, Mrs. Chaplin came up to the sitting-room; and I saw by her manner that she had something to tell me, but that she hesitated; and I therefore feared it was nothing very pleasant.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Price," she said, when I anxiously put a question to her: "but I think it necessary to inform you that there has been a queer-looking man making inquiries about you during your absence. The fact is, I saw this man lurking in the street about ten o'clock this morning, just before Captain Quentin came in the hackney-coach to take you to Cambridge Heath Gate: but I did not think much of it at the time. Shortly after you had gone, as I happened to be looking out of the window, I saw this same person cross the street; and approaching the front door, he gave a dubious kind of knock. I went and answered it myself. He seemed disconcerted on beholding me—put some frivolous question—and went away. I thought it strange, and did not much like it. In the afternoon the charwoman who has been engaged here to-day, told me that as she was going along the street to fetch something from a shop, she was accosted by a man, who slipped half-a-crown into her hand and asked her several questions about you,—who that young gentleman was that visited you—how long you were going to stay here—where you had been at the time you went into Buckinghamshire—and where you were going when you left London. Now, I must tell you that the charwoman is a discreet body in her way; and, as she told me, she was not fool enough to give back the half-crown—but she would not suffer herself to be sifted in respect to anything she might happen to know in regard to yourself. So the man was none the wiser by the questioning, but was out of pocket his half crown."

"This is most singular," I observed, somewhat uneasy. "Who can possibly be setting a watch

upon my actions? But you have not explained what sort of a person the man was."

"A middle-aged individual, with a repulsive countenance. He was dressed in a suit of shabby and threadbare black, and might be described as a broken-down tradesman or a decayed clerk. His linen was none of the cleanest; and he smelt of spirits. Altogether, I did not like his look at all," added Mrs. Chaplin.

"And I am perfectly at a loss," I added, "to conceive what his motive can be, or who can have any interest in becoming acquainted with my movements. I have not the slightest recollection of any such person as you have described."

The incident annoyed and even alarmed me so much, that after retiring to bed I lay awake for a considerable time, pondering upon it. In the morning, when I rose, I looked from the window of the front room, to see if any person answering the description of that man was lurking about in the street: but I saw no one corresponding with his portraiture. Eustace called upon me between eleven and twelve; and I told him what I had heard. He also was much annoyed and alarmed,—begging and imploring that I would be cautious in my proceedings: for it would drive him to despair if I fell into any pitfall that secret and unknown enemies might be preparing to entrap me. On the following day I repaired to Trevanion Hall, where I was most kindly welcomed by Mr. Crawford and Sybilla. They were both sorry that Captain Quentin had not come also: but I informed them that after the recent loss which Sybilla had sustained in her father's death, he did not like to intrude upon them: nor should I have done so, had it not been for the representations of Mrs. Summery. Sybilla replied, half reproachfully, that I ought to be well aware that my presence would be a solace to her, and not an intrusion; and she insisted that I should remain at least a week. I complied with this kind invitation; and at the end of the period returned to London. The first question I put to Mrs. Chaplin, on reaching the house in the afternoon, was whether the strange man had been again seen lurking about in the vicinage? She responded in the negative; and I was rejoiced with the hope that whatsoever the intentions of the unknown enemy might have been, they were most probably abandoned: but I was not the less bewildered as to the quarter whence would come the danger (if any) that had appeared to threaten me.

I must here mention two little incidents which ought not to be omitted. One was that I had received the kindest and most grateful letter from Jemima, acknowledging the receipt of the presents I had sent through her husband, and congratulating me on having recovered the fortune of which the foulest conspiracy had sought to deprive me. The other incident to which I alluded, was a visit from Barbauld Azetha on the same evening of my return from Trevanion Hall. She had been absent from London ever since the night when she played the bold stroke by which the genuine will was recovered;—she had only just returned to the metropolis—and now came to thank me for the handsome presents I had sent her, and which she found in St. Giles's on her arrival. She however regretted that I should have thought such acknowledgment necessary, — adding that she had not

failed to bestow rewards upon the two men who had personated the constables, and that her share of the gifts were regarded by her as mementoes from which she should never part.

On the following morning Eustace made his appearance at an earlier hour than usual—for I had sent to let him know of my return; and he entered the room with a countenance on which delight was beaming. The Earl of Chilstone's application to the Minister had been promptly attended to, and was perfectly successful: Captain Quentin had received an appointment in the War Office, with a salary of four hundred a year. He embraced me in an enthusiastic manner, as I congratulated him in the warmest terms. It was indeed a source of the utmost happiness to me that the noble-hearted Eustace should once more be placed in an independent position; and I felt that I could now leave London with only half the regret I should otherwise have experienced in parting from him. As this was to be my last day in the metropolis, Eustace and William both spent it with me; and we were as happy as we possibly could be with the prospect of separation before our eyes. On the following morning Eustace came to see me safe to the coach that was to bear me into Kent; and ere we parted, he whispered fondly in my ear that he should enter with a good heart upon the avocations of his new office, inasmuch as he was now cheered by the prospect that at the expiration of twelve months he should be enabled to call me his own. But he added that as there were certain periods when Government officials were allowed a holiday, he should avail himself of it to run down to Walmer and pass his vacation in my society.

It was my intention, when leaving London, to proceed straight on to Walmer without tarrying at Canterbury longer than was necessary: but on reaching this latter city at about four o'clock in the afternoon, I found that every place in the Deal coach was already taken; and as there was no other public vehicle to that town, I had to decide between the two alternatives of taking a post-chaise or passing the night at Canterbury. I resolved upon the latter course, inasmuch as it was far less expensive, and I determined to economize my means as much as possible. I accordingly proceeded to the *Fountain Hotel*: but just as I was entering the courtyard, I heard myself named by a kind and familiar voice—and the next moment my hand was grasped by Mr. Twisden. I must here remind the reader that when last I encountered this gentleman and his family—in the neighbourhood of Wye about twenty months back—Mrs. Twisden had requested me to send her from London a particular kind of shawl. This commission I executed soon after my return to the metropolis from Brighton: but as the incident was so trivial, I did not record it in its proper place. The shawl had cost me ten guineas; and I must add that I received a few lines of acknowledgment, written in terms of overweening civility, from the lady—but without enclosing the amount for the article. I was of course surprised at this, as I knew that Mr. Twisden was not merely particular in money-matters, but likewise liberal and generous—and it was odd he had not seen the debt promptly paid. But of course I took no farther notice of the matter at the time—and indeed had now long ceased to think of it.

"Well, my dear Mary," cried the good-natured old gentleman, as he grasped my hand in the courtyard of the *Fountain Hotel*, "so you are once more in these parts. I am truly delighted to see you! Of course you are going to Ashford, your native place? and we are just about to start for the Lodge. The carriage is getting in readiness—and Mrs. Twisden is up-stairs putting on her things. You must come with us. If you will stay at the Lodge till to-morrow—or for a week, or a month—the longer the better—you will be cordially welcome: that I can really promise. But if you won't make a halt, I will send you on in the carriage to Ashford."

Mr. Twisden had, in his own kind-hearted way, spoken with so much volubility that I was unable to thrust in a word, until he stopped short of his own accord. I expressed my thankfulness for his kind propositions; but assured him that I must be at Walmer on the following day. He would not however listen to any refusal: he made me tell him with whom I was going to stay; and on finding that they were friends, he insisted that they could spare me for at least a few hours to pass that interval at Twisden Lodge. I knew not well how to refuse the old gentleman: but still I did hesitate, because I was unaware how his wife might view the proceeding.

"Ah! I understand what is passing in your mind," he said, with a sly smile: "but you need not refuse on that account. Ever since you sent Mrs. T. the shawl, she has spoken in the highest terms of you. She says she always loved you: but of course, my dear Mary, I don't exactly require you to believe this part of the business unless you like."

The old gentleman had lowered his voice to a confidential whisper as he gave utterance to these last words: and it was well that he did so—for at the moment Mrs. Twisden, superbly dressed, emerged from a doorway leading towards the staircase.

"Hey-day, Mr. Twisden!" she at once cried in her sharp querulous voice: "who are you gallanting with? I will scratch——"

"It's Miss Price, my dear—our friend Mary," Mr. Twisden hastened to answer: so that the lady's sentence was left unfinished—though there could not be any doubt that, if continued, it would have had a more pointed reference than would have been pleasant either to the eyes of her husband or my own.

"Ah! Mary my love—Miss Price, I mean—Mary my dear friend—is it indeed you? Go and see about the carriage directly, Mr. Twisden!"—and the old gentleman hurried off accordingly. The transition was truly remarkable from the hypocritically endearing tone she adopted towards me, to the sudden peremptory harshness with which she turned upon her husband. She caught me by the hand—pulled me towards her—and as Mr. Twisden decamped from the spot to see about the carriage, she said hurriedly, "I hope, my dear Mary, you did not let out anything about the shawl, you know? The fact is, Mr. T. gave me the money to remit to you: but I had so many little drains upon me at the time, that I couldn't spare it—and I knew you didn't want it."

"I can assure you," I answered, "that I said

nothing to Mr. Twisden on the subject. Indeed, he did not ask me——”

“So much the better!” interrupted the lady. “You are a kind, good creature, Mary—and you know that I always loved you.”

I thought that if she had, she used to take a singular mode of displaying her affection at the time I was in her service; but of course I did not give audible expression to my thoughts.

“Not that I care anything about what Mr. T. might say,” she continued; “because you know that I am accustomed to be the mistress in all things: for of course I fully appreciate my rights as a woman. But at the same time, there are certain things in which one doesn’t like to appear mean; and I must confess you must have fancied it very odd that I did not enclose the amount for the shawl.”

“I beg you not to say anything more of it,” I answered.

“Well, this is generous of you,” she promptly rejoined; “and as you wish it, I will accept the shawl as a present.”

I really had said nothing of the kind: but as Mrs. Price chose to put this construction on my words, I did not choose to show an anxiety for payment.

“I hope Mr. Twisden asked you to come and stay with us?” continued his wife. “We shall be so happy. We visited London last winter, and called on you at Miss Maitland’s: but you had gone abroad together; and then two or three months back, we read the notice of the poor young lady’s death in the newspaper. Don’t think me impertinent: but did she die well off? and were you well remembered?”

I was for the first moment so disgusted with these queries, that I had a great mind not to answer them: but fearing she would persecute me with further questions, I said, though somewhat coldly, “My deceased friend Miss Maitland was very rich; and she behaved towards me as if I had been her sister. In a word, she left me the great bulk of her fortune, and her sole executrix.”

“Well, Mary—Miss Price I mean—I am pleased!” cried Mrs. Twisden, again grasping my hand with an immense display of affection, which was however no doubt a tribute to the fortune she supposed me still to possess, rather than a genuine feeling displayed on my own account. “Only think what a lady you have become! An heiress! Wonders will never cease. I wish to heaven somebody would leave me a fortune: for Mr. T. does get so stingy in his old age; and money-matters are the only occasions on which he ever shows a will of his own. God bless the man! I must drive his meanness out of him yet. But after what you have told me, I have all the less hesitation in accepting the shawl. I shall keep it as a memento of your love and gratitude for all the little kindnesses I was enabled to show you when you were first with us. But here’s the carriage. Now then, porter, see that Miss Price’s trunks are put up—take care of Miss Price’s bonnet-box! There, Mr. Twisden! don’t stand staring and gaping in that stupid manner: but hand Miss Price into the carriage. Go first, Miss Price—and I will follow.”

In this manner did she din out my name in the ears of all present; and I beheld her turn round

and whisper some hasty remark to the landlord and landlady of the hotel; so that I have not the slightest doubt she was telling them that I was a great heiress. We entered the carriage; and it drove away.

“I hope, my dear Miss Price,” said Mrs. Twisden, as we thus journeyed along, “that you will give us your company for at least a few days—although I am afraid you will find the Lodge somewhat dull: for those dear children that you were so fond of, are all gone to boarding-schools. Miranda, you know, is now nearly fourteen; and she has gone to be finished at Miss Tubley’s fashionable establishment at Brighton. Only eighty guineas a year!—and would you believe it—her papa, like a most unnatural father as he is, grumbled and grunted so at the price, it was quite painful to hear him!”

“But, my dear,” interposed Mr. Twisden meekly, “I can’t help thinking still that eighty guineas——”

“Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden!” cried the lady. “You will give me the head-ache. I am sure Miss Price will agree with me that eighty guineas for such an establishment as Miss Tubley’s, is the merest trifle. None but the daughters of the aristocracy and gentry! Miss Tubley is so very particular. She puts, in an N. B. to her prospectus——”

“Cash in advance,” observed the old gentleman.

“No, Mr. Twisden—I did not mean that, sir,” interrupted his wife fiercely. “I meant that other N.B.”

“A silver spoon and fork required with each pupil,” added Mr. Twisden.

“How provoking you are,” vociferated his wife: “you are only doing it to annoy me. The fact is, my dear Miss Price, there are three N.B.’s to Miss Tubley’s prospectus; and it is the one which stands last that I mean. *None but young ladies belonging to families where carriages are kept, are received at Daffodil House.*”

“And the house looks as much like a daffodil,” said Mr. Twisden, with a sort of subdued grant, “as you, my dear, look like a rose.”

The lady actually screamed out in the excess of her rage; and I instinctively threw up my arm to keep her back: for at the moment I feared she was about to make a desperate assault upon her husband, who was seated opposite to her in the carriage.

“No, Mary,” she exclaimed, with a terrible vixenish querulousness in her accents, “I won’t do as I ought—I won’t scratch his eyes out: I will leave him in possession of them that he may have the satisfaction of seeing me waste and pine away under his cruel treatment. And I tell you what, Mr. Twisden—it is only out of respect to our dear young friend here, that I don’t box your ears soundly for you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why am I not a rose? why am I not, I should like to know? Answer me that.”

“Well, my dear, in one sense perhaps you are,” responded Mr. Twisden: and then, as he muttered something about “thorns,” he hastily shifted his position to the other corner of the carriage, so that he was now seated opposite to me.

“I scorn your innuendo,” exclaimed the lady, with a sudden and transient revival of the tragedy-

queen air of the dramatic period of her life: then addressing herself again to me, she went on to observe, "Dickey is also at school. He's at the Rev. Dr. Birchington's at Ramsgate—an excellent establishment, where they have their morals carefully attended to and enjoy the advantages of sea-bathing."

"That's in the prospectus," observed Mr. Twisden, again plucking up his courage; "and so are the silver fork and spoon too?"

"Dickey is getting such a nice boy," continued the lady.

"Yes—and makes nice faces, too," added the old gentleman.

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden. You are really unbearable. Gustavus, you must know, Mary," continued the lady, "has gone to College: he is now close upon eighteen. Dear me! and to think it was but the other day he was under your care!"

"But it was eight years ago, if I recollect right, that Mary first came to us," said Mr. Twisden; "and I really do believe that Gus is as big a dunce as he was then."

"For shame of you, Mr. Twisden," vociferated his wife, "to talk in this way of your own son. But it is just like you: you are always discontented."

"Perhaps, my dear, I endeavour to study your example as much as possible."

"You see, my dear Miss Price," continued Mrs. Twisden, bestowing a contemptuous toss of the head on her husband, "that our three children are now all dispersed about; and though in one sense it's a great deal off my mind, yet in another I regret their absence: the Lodge is quite dull without them. I quite miss their sweet pranks. You know what a dear boy that Dickey was, and how you used to love him. Miranda will no doubt grow up quite elegant and accomplished under Miss Tubley."

In this manner was the conversation pursued during the ride from Canterbury to the Lodge. The dusk was setting in when we arrived in the precincts of the habitation: but still it was light enough for me to mark the spot where I had first encountered Eustace Quentin in company with Sir Aubrey Clavering. Oh! what a warm gush of feelings went through my heart as I reflected that the elegant and handsome youth whom I had thus met at a time when I occupied the humblest rank, was now my affianced suitor, and in a comparatively short time to become my husband! And here was I, too, sitting as an equal and a friend in company with those in whose service I was a mere menial at the period to which my thoughts reverted. The carriage whirled through the paddock, and drove up to the entrance of the mansion. Amongst the domestics who came forth, I looked to see if I could recognize any familiar faces: but not one was known to me. In a few minutes I was seated in the drawing-room which I had been wont to enter with such fear and trembling during my term of servitude at the Lodge. Presently dinner was announced; and we descended to that dining-parlour, where, if anybody a few years back had told me I should sit down as a guest, to be treated and waited upon as a lady, I should have rejected the prophecy as outrageously preposterous. Never-

theless, so it was. When night came I was conducted to the best bedroom; and the instant I found myself alone there, I could not help bursting into tears. My feelings overcame me as I was again reminded of the immense difference that existed between my present position as an honoured guest, and what it was when I was a poor drudge, constantly scolded and found fault with beneath that same roof.

I rose very early in the morning, and descended to walk in the garden. My footsteps led me to the spot where Eustace Quentin had rescued me from the arms of Sir Aubrey Clavering, and where that quarrel took place which led to the duel wherein he was wounded on my account. I stood for some time on that spot, once more reflecting on the change in my condition: and silently, but from the depths of my soul, did I put up a prayer to heaven in thanksgiving for my redemption from a state of drudgery and servitude.

At breakfast time both Mr. and Mrs. Twisden pressed me to remain with them for at least some days: but I assured them that I must take my leave within an hour or two, as I intended to go to Ashford. For, inasmuch, as I found myself so near my native place, I thought that I would pay it a passing visit—so that I might cast a look upon my mother's grave, and once more behold the cottage of my birth. I did not however explain my motives to the Twisdens: for I knew that the lady was perfectly incapable of appreciating them.

"Well, at all events you must stay to luncheon," said Mr. Twisden; "and you shall have the carriage afterwards to take you across to Ashford."

"Yes—do remain a few hours longer, Mary," cried the lady; "and I tell you what I will do I will show you some letters which I have had from dear Miranda; and you will see how highly she speaks of Miss Tubley's establishment. I must tell you that I stipulated with Miss Tubley that Miranda was to write home whenever she chose, and that her letters were not to be inspected. So that what she says, is all written of her own free will."

"And precious stuff it is too," interjected Mr. Twisden: but seeing that his wife flung an ireful glance upon him, he bolted a huge piece of toast, whereby he was nearly choked.

Breakfast being over,—and I having consented to remain till after luncheon, so as not to appear ungrateful for the kind old gentleman's hospitality,—Mrs. Twisden conducted me up to her own chamber, and triumphantly displayed half-a-dozen of Miranda's letters, all of which she insisted I should read through.

"Now, my dear Miss Price," she said, when the task was accomplished, "I know you love Miranda very much; and therefore I must give you a memento of that dear girl. Pray accept this letter: it is the best written of the lot—and I am certain you will be pleased to possess it. Now don't refuse: you are not depriving me of it—and besides, I must make you some little return for the shawl."

I accordingly accepted this most valuable gift; and I do not think that I am guilty of any great breach of confidence in laying the contents of the letter before the reader, as a specimen of the elegant epistolary emanations from a pupil of the fashionable finishing schoolmistress at Brighton. Here it is:—

"Daffodil House, Brighton.
"May 15, 1834.

"My dear Mamma,

"I've just come home from a donkey ride up to the Downs, for Miss Tubley is very particular in obeying your instructions that I was to take equestrian exercise. Several other young ladies were indulged in the same delightful manner; and it was very exhilarating, what with the bracing breeze and our being all pitched off into the furze-bushes. It did us a world of good, and we got an excellent appetite for the cheese-cakes we stopped and eat at the pastry-cook's on the way home. Miss Tubley is very kind and good to me, and she is so amiable, letting me pay for her cheese-cakes just as if she was one of ourselves instead of the schoolmistress. We went for a walk yesterday along the King's Road, where we saw all the beautiful shops and the handsome officers. They were lounging about in plain clothes; but I knew they were officers, because Miss Jewksbury told me to observe their military walk, which I did. They are quite ducks of men; and we had green peas yesterday for dinner. I like Brighton more and more, especially since I went along the King's Road. There is a very handsome riding-master here, and all the tip-top young ladies ride out with him. Now, dear mamma, as you want me to have a fashionable education, I do hope you will write by return of post to Miss Tubley, and tell her I am to learn riding on horseback, and with a riding-master. By the bye, I will tell you a bit of news. A young lady living at Brighton, ran away last week with another handsome riding-master, and they were married. It's quite the talk of the place; and Miss Jewksbury, who knew him well, drew his portrait on her slate, instead of a rule-of-three sum, and we all thought it very tasteful indeed. But, dear mamma, you needn't be afraid that I shall run away with a riding-master; because I faithfully promise you I will not. Ever since I subscribed to the circulating library,—which Miss Tubley lets us do, because she says that we must make ourselves acquainted with the fashionable literature of the day,—I have made up my mind never to run away with any one short of a Marquis. We are going to a concert to-morrow night; and Miss Jewksbury has just whispered to me that all the officers will be there. So you see, dear mamma, there's no want of amusement at Brighton; and I am quite happy. The major of the regiment has just ridden past on such a beautiful horse. He has got such fine moustaches—and the horse such a lovely tail. He is certainly very handsome. I mean the horse, dear mamma—of course; but some how or another I am all in a flurry at this moment. Pray send me some more money; as there will be lots of concerts and gay doings. And send Miss Tubley orders to let me have a new dress. Indeed, dear mamma, you must, because—the major has just gone by again, and he did look so up at the window, where, by an accident, there is no blind to-day. But I am in such a flurry to finish this letter and save post, that I scarcely know what I am writing. Oh! I was asking you to let me have a new dress, because I have worn my best one three times already; and it is not genteel to appear in the same too often. The people at Brighton are such observers. By the bye, dear mamma, you need not have me home for the holidays unless you like. I have not asked about it yet—but I know that Miss Tubley *does* allow young ladies to remain at Daffodil House during the vacation, because it was in last Christmas holidays that Miss Fitzalzin (a young lady descended from a very old Norman family, which came over at the time of the Conquest by Julius Cæsar, or William the First, I forget which) ran away with the surgeon's apprentice. Wasn't it disgraceful—to demean herself so!

"Love to dear pa; and accept, my dear mamma,

"This kind and inviting letter from

"Your affectionate daughter,

"MIRANDA TWISDEN."

What the young lady meant by a "kind and inviting letter," I really am at a loss to conceive; and I did not question her mother upon the point. But I

did venture to hint my fears that Miss Tubley's establishment was not precisely the one best calculated to ensure Miss Miranda's future well-being in life. Mrs. Twisden would not however hear anything against that fashionable finishing seminary; and so I held my peace. I longed however to find an opportunity of whispering the same caution to Mr. Twisden: but the hour for departure came without the interval affording me an occasion to speak to him alone. Mrs. Twisden, with a degree of politeness that was absolutely execrating, begged me to pay the Lodge another visit soon; and the old gentleman, shaking me by the hand with a warmth that was truly cordial and utterly devoid of affectation, assured me that nothing had given him greater pleasure than to receive me at the Lodge as a friend and a guest.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE DESERTED HOUSE.

THE carriage took me across to Ashford; and I alighted at the *Saracen's Head*, where the landlady was quite rejoiced to see me. I walked forth alone to the churchyard, and stood by the side of the grave in which reposed the remains of my mother. What sad reflections were conjured up by this revisit to the resting-place of my departed parent! All the terrific incidents immediately connected with her death—the contents of the letter with the black seal—her mysterious connexion with Sir Wyndham Clavering—the scene which Mad Tommy had beheld on the bank of the river—the uncertainty which still enwrapped my father's fate,—all, all swept through my mind like a dread panorama! My eyes were bent down upon the grave; and though no word came from my lips, yet in the secret depths of my heart did I pray that heaven would have mercy upon the soul of my poor mother, if she had indeed been guilty;—and, alas! how could I think otherwise? So absorbed was I in my reflections and my prayer, that I did not catch the sounds of any footstep approaching over the long grass which grew amidst that maze of graves: but suddenly a half-subdued and convulsive sob struck my ear; and raising my eyes, I beheld—good heavens! the very image of my father.

Yes: there he stood—either he or that man Graham, if they were indeed two distinct persons!—there he stood, in rude attire, with pale and careworn countenance, and his hair completely gray. All this I embraced with a single glance; and the next moment extending my arms towards him, I exclaimed, "Oh! if you are he whom I once called father, speak—speak!"

But he waved me imperiously back as I was rushing towards him; and he fled precipitately, an angle of the immense church in a few moments hiding him from my view. I was too much shocked by that peremptory manner in which he signalled me off, to follow in his footsteps immediately: but when in a few minutes I had the power to do so, he was no longer to be seen. I thought of searching for him all over the town: but calmer reflection showed me how useless it was to adopt this course; for if he were resolute in avoiding me—as he evidently was—of what avail would my researches

be? I lingered in the church-yard to reflect upon the incident. I entertained the conviction that this *was* my father—that he was alive—that I had been deceived as to the man Graham—and that the two were identically *one*. For if there were such a person as Graham, why should he have visited that particular grave? why should he have sobbed on approaching it? why should he have waved me off from him in that imperious manner? Nothing of all this would a mere stranger have done: but everything of all this might my father be well expected to do under existing circumstances. Yes—all doubt was banished from my mind: a certainty, which no denial could remove, was established in its place. My father still lived—and I had seen him!

But, Oh! this father of mine was unhappy—he was a wanderer on the face of the earth—he had none to console him. Oh, to discover whither he went—to trace him—to follow up the track unweariedly till I found him,—then to force myself upon his presence—to insist upon being heard—to tell him that I still considered myself to be his daughter, and that I would pay him filial respect and show him filial love,—to have him with me, that we might dwell together—that I might surround him with comforts, and endeavour to smooth the declining years of his existence,—Oh, to accomplish all this, was a duty which it behoved me to undertake! But how to discover him? There was only one method. This was to return to London—to go to the Gipsy Queen—to look her steadily in the face—and to say, “Barbauld, I have seen my father: I have acquired positive proof that he lives. Whatever your motives may have hitherto been for denying the fact, it is useless to persevere in that denial. I do not reproach you: I give you credit for the best possible intentions: but it has now come to this,—that we shall cease to be friends if you refuse to bring me face to face with my father!”

In this manner was my resolve taken. I even thought of setting out for London without an hour’s delay: but I felt so ill and agitated through the excitement I had undergone at that unexpected encounter with my sire, that I feared if I travelled in such a state of mind, I should be laid up altogether. Besides, there would be little use in speeding so precipitately to the metropolis while my father was still absent: and therefore, all things considered, I decided upon postponing the renewal of my journey until the morrow. I went and gazed upon the cottage in which I was born, and where sixteen years of my life had been passed. It was now in a much better condition than when I had last seen it: it had fallen into new hands: its present occupants evidently took a pride in giving their dwelling an appearance of neatness; and I was pleased at the circumstance. It was nearly six o’clock when I returned to the hotel; and having partaken of tea,—for the luncheon at the Twisdens’ had served me instead of dinner,—I wrote a letter to Mrs. Kingston, explaining the reason of my protracted delay in making my appearance at the Grange. When the letter was finished, I endeavoured to while away the time with some books which the landlady lent me: but I could not settle my attention thereon. My thoughts continued wandering—naturally enough—to the incident

which had that afternoon occurred, and the many associations it conjured up.

It was past nine o’clock,—and I was thinking of retiring to rest, so that I might rise early in the morning and set out again upon my travels,—when the waiter entered and handed me a note. The address was to *Miss Price, Saracen’s Head Inn*; and written in a genteel masculine hand. My first thought, and indeed *hope*, was that it came from my father—that he had relented—and that he intended to see me. But when my eye glanced at the superscription, I knew it was not in his handwriting. Nevertheless, with a fluttering heart I tore it open, and read these lines:—

“You are earnestly requested and enjoined to meet a certain person in half-an-hour from the receipt of this, immediately in front of the closed up house which some time back was inhabited by a certain Mrs. Whitfield. Something nearly concerning you influences the present proceeding. Come alone, or it will be useless. Do not be followed by anybody, even at a distance: or it will be equally useless for you to come at all. He who writes would not harm a hair of your head. But more he cannot say. Have faith, and have courage; and you will not regret the step you are entreated and adjured to take.”

Good heavens! I thought to myself, this must be from my father: or at least some one had written it for him. I felt assured that it came from him. From whom else could it come? The waiter, on handing me the note, had quitted the room: I composed my feelings, and rang the bell. He immediately answered the summons.

“Who brought this note?” I inquired.

“A lad, who is a stranger to me, Miss,” was the reply; “and immediately he gave it into my hand, he hurried away.”

“That will do,” I said: and when once more alone, I read the letter again and again. The mingled tone of entreaty and command seemed to corroborate my idea that the missive came from my sire. That he should observe so much caution was natural enough: for how was he aware to what extent the tremendous tragedy of upwards of eight years back on the bank of the river, might be known to the town’s-people? and if caught and identified, would he not be tried as the murderer of Sir Wyndham Clavering? Yes: the longer I reflected upon the contents of that letter, the deeper grew my conviction that it emanated from him whom I still chose to call by the name of father. I had no thought for any other subject: I could not possibly attribute the letter to any other origin than that which I have just named. My heart was all in a flutter—my mind was full of mingled hope and suspense; and so far from hesitating whether to obey the summons, I was all anxiety to speed to the place of appointment.

Having suffered about twenty minutes to elapse, I put on my bonnet and shawl; and issuing from the hotel, repaired to the street in which stood the late Mrs. Whitfield’s deserted house. The evening was dark—no lamps burnt there—and as I entered the street, I strained my eyes to penetrate the obscurity, to discover if any one were waiting at the spot indicated. As I drew nearer to the house, I was still unable to catch a glimpse of any loiterer: so I hurried on—and a few moments brought me to the entrance of that narrow alley which has before been described as separating the deserted



house from an adjacent dwelling. Here I paused, and looked rapidly up and down the street as well as the obscurity would permit: but all in a moment I was seized upon by two men, who sprang forth from that alley—and the cry which rose to my lips was stifled ere it escaped, by a handkerchief thrown over my head and drawn so tightly upon my face, especially the mouth, that I was almost suffocated. Resistance was vain: the arms which held me were powerful,—and I was hurried helplessly along. The back gate of the deserted house had evidently been left open: for I was at once conveyed without an instant's pause into the back yard. In a few moments more I was inside the building with my captors: the door through which the house had thus been entered was closed—the handkerchief was removed from my head—and by the light of a candle dimly burning in the grate, I perceived that I was in the power of Theobald Maitland. A rapid glance

at his companion instantaneously showed me that he corresponded with the portraiture which Mrs. Chaplin had drawn of the ill-looking man who had called at her house and subsequently made inquiries concerning me of the charwoman. So far from losing my presence of mind, I acquired fortitude from the indignation excited within me; and I at once demanded the reason of this outrage.

"My explanations are briefly given," returned Theobald Maitland, with the resolute tone and manner of finished ruffianism: and at the same time he produced a brace of pistols, the sight of which I must confess made me recoil. "You see before you a desperate man—one whose affairs are in such a state that it is impossible, by anything he may do, to make them worse—while, on the other hand, by a bold stroke it is possible to make them better. You had your triumph the other day—I am going to have mine now: you obtained possession of my de-

ceased cousin's property—and I intend to share with you in the enjoyment of it. In a word, you must consent to become my wife."

"Monster! how dare you make such a proposal?" I exclaimed, feeling my blood boiling in every vein. "Let me depart—or I will scream—I will shriek for assistance!"—and I rushed to the door of the back kitchen, where this scene took place.

"Escape is impossible," said Theobald Maitland with a sneering laugh, as I vainly endeavoured to open the door: for it was locked, and the key had been taken out. "As for your threat of screaming and shrieking, it will be the worse for you if you put it into execution. I will fell you to the ground with the butt-end of this pistol. So beware! I tell you that I am a desperate man—so desperate indeed, that I will commit murder if driven to it: but I would rather avoid it. Now listen: for you may not exactly understand your position. Either consent to become my wife—or prepare for death. If you marry me you can live to enjoy your fortune in my society:—and we *will* enjoy it, I can promise you! But if you refuse, there will be an end of you; and then understand well, I shall hasten up to London, and by *another* forgery—for I am not particular, you see—shall get possession of all I want."

I had not interrupted the villain while he was thus speaking; for my fortitude was abandoning me, and a cold terror was creeping into my soul. There was indeed something desperate in the look, the language, and the entire bearing of Theobald Maitland: while his companion possessed a countenance which indicated the ruffian capable of any atrocity. To find myself in the power of such miscreants was indeed enough to crush me with cruellest apprehensions; and I saw that my position was a fearful one.

"Come, Mary Price," continued Maitland, still grasping the pistols, "you must make haste and decide: time is precious. It is of no use to entreat or implore, or give way to woman's wonted nonsense: for I am not to be moved. And that you may be aware of the sternness of my purpose, I will give you a few facts to prove it. I had you watched narrowly in Conduit Street: I had everything arranged to carry you off then—but you did not furnish the opportunity. We followed you down into Kent—we were on your track at Canterbury yesterday evening—we traced you to Twicken Lodge—we came on this afternoon to Ashford—our determination was to adopt bold and immediate measures. A walk about the town showed us this house; and we found it to be fitted for our purpose. We have succeeded—and here you are. If I tell you all this, it is to convince you that so much pains have not been taken to end in disappointment, if I can help it. Now then, Mary Price, your decision—and let it be given promptly. Consent to become my wife, or make up your mind to die. If the former, you will have to take me as your husband now; and the ceremony," he added with a sneer, "can be performed by special license when we get up to London. But mind, you shall be mine this night—or else there is an end of you."

I was on the point of shrieking out in the horror and dismay which seized upon me, when all of a sudden the door was broken in with a terrific crash;

—and a man, armed with a bludgeon, rushed into the place.

"Father—dear father!" I exclaimed, in mingled astonishment and joy: for at a glance did I recognize him.

Maitland raised the pistol which he held in his right hand: but with extraordinary suddenness did my father dash his arm upwards—and the weapon flashed in the pan. To strike him down with a blow of his bludgeon, was the work of the next instant: and his guilty accomplice made for the door to escape. But my father hurled him back with such violence that he fell heavily against the opposite wall.

"Away with you, Mary—away with you!" said my father: and, Oh! the unmistakable tones of his voice stirred the tenderest feelings of my soul, even in that moment of hurried excitement. I was about to fling myself into his arms: but he stamped his foot with such angry impatience, as he cried, "Quick—depart—I follow!" that I obeyed him mechanically and promptly. Issuing from the kitchen, I rushed up the few steps leading into the yard at the back of the house; and my father, closing the door, came immediately after me. Again would I have sought to embrace him: but he pushed me forward, saying in a low tone, but with vehement manner, "Go on—go on! An alarm may be raised *too soon*—it were my death if I were caught!"

The fearful truth of his words struck me in an instant; and speeding through the gateway, I flitted along the alley—but paused when I reached the street. He immediately joined me there, and grasping me by the arm, said sternly and imperiously, "Speak not a word—but listen!"

I trembled with the violent agitation of my feelings. Was I not to be permitted to embrace him whom I called my father, and whom I had found at last?

"Go back to your hotel—give an alarm as soon as you please—and have those wretches punished for the outrage. Do not fear for me: I shall be at a safe distance hence in a very few minutes. God bless you, Mary!"—and suddenly quitting his grasp upon my arm, he caught my hand—pressed it warmly for a moment—then bursting away from me, rushed along the street in the direction of the open country, and was lost in the darkness.

"Father, father!" I murmured, clasping my hands in despair at this abrupt separation; and overpowered by my feelings, I tottered against the wall of the house for support. But the next moment I was recalled to a sense of renewed danger by the sudden rush of footsteps along the alley; and I was convinced that the two villains must be at hand. Terror lent wings to my feet: I darted down the street—and in a few minutes reached the hotel. It was in a dreadful state of excitement that I burst into the landlady's parlour; and sinking upon a chair, exclaimed, "Thank heaven, I am safe!"

As may naturally be supposed, the landlady was both amazed and alarmed at my conduct and appearance; for I was pale as death—my bonnet was all bent—and my hair in disorder, through the violence which had been used in making me captive. She hastily gave me some wine-and-water, and entreated me to tell her what had happened. Several minutes however elapsed before I could suf-

ficiently compose my feelings to describe the outrage and the circumstance of my deliverance: but, as a matter of course, I suppressed all mention of my father, leaving the worthy woman to suppose that it was by the intervention of some stranger my rescue had been effected. She congratulated me on my providential escape, and said, "Miss Price, you will not allow this atrocious conduct to pass over unnoticed?"

"No—assuredly not," I responded quickly: for I was still very much excited. "I must be protected against these villains for the future."

The landlady rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to proceed at once to fetch the head constable of the town. During the interval which elapsed ere that functionary made his appearance, I took off my battered bonnet and arranged my hair. When the constable came—which was in about a quarter of an hour—I recited to him the particulars of the outrage; and in respect to my deliverance, rendered the same account I had already given to the landlady. The constable said that he would at once despatch emissaries in different directions to endeavour to capture the culprits, of whom I drew an accurate portraiture; and he likewise observed that he should go and pay a visit to the deserted house, to see if they had extinguished the light, and also to shut it up again.

When he had taken his departure, the landlady begged me to retire to rest, that I might compose my excited feelings in slumber. But for this I felt not the least inclination; and declared that I would sit up for half-an-hour or so, inasmuch as in her society I was more likely to regain my self-possession than in the solitude of a bed-chamber. I accordingly remained conversing with the landlady upon the incidents of the evening; and thus nearly an hour passed away. At the expiration of that time a man was introduced by the waiter into the parlour where I was seated with the landlady. This man was one of the head constable's subordinates; and he begged me to accompany him at once to the late Mrs. Whitfield's house, as some discovery had been made of the nature of which he himself was not exactly aware, but which the head constable was anxious to communicate. Although confident that there was no treacherous intent in this request, I nevertheless had a disinclination to return to the house in the society of a stranger; and I begged the landlady to go with me. To this she assented; and in a few minutes we set out together, both wondering what the nature of the discovery could possibly be—for the man was unable to give any particulars. On reaching the house, this man led the way by the same back entrance through which I had been so forcibly conveyed by Maitland and his accomplice, and by which I had followed my sister Sarah when she went treasure-hunting thither upwards of five years back. A lantern was burning in the back kitchen: the constable took it in his hand, and led us up the staircase to the second storey.

I should observe that for this period of more than five years the house had remained shut up—the windows barricaded—the place deserted. The dust had everywhere accumulated: the stair carpets were rotting, and were so black that it was impossible to discern their original colour: the dust from

the balustrades and walls was so thick, that it was with difficulty we could prevent our garments from sweeping it off as we ascended the stairs. The constable conducted us to that room which had served as Mrs. Whitfield's bed-chamber when she was alive, and where that scene took place between myself and Sarah on the one hand, and the Bulldog and Sawbridge on the other, which has been related in an early chapter of this narrative. And what a spectacle did this room present! Its disturbed appearance was just as I had last beheld it on the occasion referred to: but the dust had accumulated thickly since. Everything was in confusion—every article of furniture was out of its place;—the carpet, dragged up from the floor and thrust into one corner, looked like a blackened pile of cobwebs: the bedding, likewise on the floor, was all rotting. The cupboards and the drawers stood open. Several panels having been removed from the wainscot by my sister at the time of her treasure-search, gave the apartment a still more dilapidated and sinister appearance. There, too, was the opening in the floor where a plank had been lifted by the Bulldog and Sawbridge, and where they had found the hidden treasure which Sarah had so vainly sought. And in the middle of this room stood the head constable, carefully wiping away the dust with his pocket-handkerchief from a parchment which he had stretched upon a table where a candle was burning, and where a pile of dingy coins was also heaped up. An idea flashed to my mind: I comprehended in a moment the nature of the discovery that had been made: it was the long-lost will of the late Mrs. Whitfield!

And so it proved to be. The head constable, having despatched several of his subordinates in pursuit of Maitland and his accomplice, had taken a man with him to visit the deserted house; and when once there, he had resolved to go all over it, to see whether there were any indications of evil-disposed persons secretly harbouring within its walls—or whether the use this night made of the premises by the authors of the outrage against myself, was only a solitary and exceptional instance. When examining the bed-chamber of the deceased Mrs. Whitfield, the head constable had felt a board in the floor yield beneath his feet; and on a closer scrutiny, he found that it was contrived to lift up. In the recess which appeared on its removal, he discovered something which, though encrusted with dust, appeared to be a document of some kind; and taking it carefully out, he found that his conjecture was correct. Fortunately the place of its concealment was not damp; and though the parchment was in a very dirty condition, it had not begun to moulder, nor was the writing effaced. At once examining the deed to see if it were of any importance, the head constable deciphered sufficient to induce him at once to send off to the hotel for me, in the hope that I might not probably have yet retired to rest. His man was engaged at the time in examining another chamber; and thus he did not learn any details in respect to the discovery which his superior had made. Nor was that all the discovery effected this night by the head constable: for during his man's absence, he had examined more particularly than at first into the long recess where he had found the will; and from amidst a mass of accumulated dust, he raked forth a quantity of gold

to the amount of between six and seven hundred pounds.

But now in respect to the will. It appeared that Mrs. Whitfield had left her entire property to my sisters Sarah and Jane, to be held in trust until they should respectively attain the age of twenty-one—or only until the marriage of both or either, should such take place previous to the attainment of majority. The trustees named were a solicitor at Canterbury (who had doubtless drawn up the will), Mr. Collins, and myself. The terms in reference to me were to the effect that the testatrix, Mrs. Whitfield, “having the utmost confidence in my prudence and propriety of conduct, had included me in this important trust.” The funded property amounted to ten thousand pounds at the time of the bequest; and to that amount five years’ compound interest was to be added. The other property consisted of the house and furniture, all pretty nearly valueless now; and there was likewise mention made of such sums as should be found on the premises after the decease of the testatrix.

The reader may well imagine how much I was rejoiced at this discovery: but that sentiment of happiness speedily became intermingled with one of mournfulness, as the circumstance vividly brought back to my mind the fall of my sister Sarah. Oh! if she had remained virtuous, what a brilliant prospect might now have expanded itself before her: for with her beauty, and possessed of a fortune of several thousand pounds, she might have aspired to an excellent matrimonial alliance. But Jane—dear Jane—*she* also was beautiful, and she likewise had now become possessed of a fortune: but what was far better than good looks or money, she was in virtuous principles all that could be desired. In respect to the will thus strangely discovered, certain conjectures naturally arose in my mind. Mrs. Whitfield was a very eccentric woman—a person, indeed, of almost incomprehensible character during her lifetime: but from this testamentary document it would appear that she possessed a heart of genuine excellence, and that she did not educate my two sisters above their original condition without all along intending to provide suitably for them. To a certain degree her habits had evidently been miserly: for the surplus of her income was thus carefully concealed beneath the flooring of her bed-chamber. That she was suspicious of the world, might be inferred from the fact that she employed an attorney at Canterbury to draw up her will, instead of the solicitor at Ashford whom she had known for many years, and who had occasionally been consulted by her in a few little legal matters. She had evidently wished to keep her affairs as much to herself as possible. One more inference did I draw from present circumstances,—which was, that Mrs. Whitfield had most probably left in her writing-desk or elsewhere, some *memorandum* to point to the spots where her will and her hoarded gold were concealed: for it could scarcely be imagined that she would have left to chance the discovery of such important matters. But if such *memorandum* was ever penned by her, it had been lost, or else was strangely overlooked at the time the search amongst her papers and effects was made after her death.

But to return to the thread of my narrative. I received, on behalf of my sisters, the congratulations

of the landlady and the head constable in respect to the strange but fortunate discovery this night made; and seldom perhaps was the proverb that “out of evil comes good,” more strikingly illustrated than in the present instance: for if I had not been forcibly conveyed into that house by Maitland and his accomplice, the will might have remained in its hiding-place to moulder and perish along with the building itself. The head constable surrendered up the document to me, as I was named one of the trustees under its provisions; and I liberally rewarded him from my own private resources. The gold which was found in the same place as the will, was likewise placed at my disposal; and I requested the constable to follow me with it to the hotel. Thither we repaired: and I gave the constable instructions to take carpenters with him in the morning, and effect a farther search on the premises,—so that in case there might be another hoard, my sisters should reap the full benefit thereof.

I slept but little that night for thinking of all the various topics which pressed themselves upon my mind. The complete clearing-up of the mystery in which my father’s fate had been hitherto involved—the outrage which had been perpetrated against me—my deliverance by my sire—the discovery of the will—the wealth which now awaited my sisters,—one after the other did these things sweep through my mind. But in respect to my father, must he not have been watching my movements to be enabled thus to arrive so opportunely to my rescue?—and if he had thus hung upon my footsteps, was it not that he still loved me? Oh! and again did I resolve not to rest until I had found him out, and besought him to take up his future residence where-soever I myself might dwell. All these thoughts kept me awake a considerable portion of the night: but towards morning slumber stole upon me, and I slept profoundly.

I awoke refreshed, though my sleep had lasted but for so brief an interval; and rising early, descended to the sitting room to breakfast. I gave orders to secure a place for me in the coach to Canterbury; and I likewise requested the landlady of the inn to send and pay the discovered gold into the Ashford bank, in my name, with the request that it might be remitted to the London bankers with whom the establishment corresponded. I gave the landlady my address at Mrs. Chaplin’s in Conduit Street, London,—so that she might write to me if anything transpired from the farther examination of the long-deserted house: then bidding her a kind farewell, I took my place in the coach, and proceeded to Canterbury,—as a matter of course taking the will with me. I again put up at the *Fountain Hotel*; and on making inquiry there respecting the whereabouts of the solicitor who had been named one of the trustees, I learnt that he had been dead for five years. This intelligence I was not very much surprised to receive: for if he had lived, he would have come forward on hearing of Mrs. Whitfield’s death, and proclaimed his knowledge of the existence of the will. It however appeared that another attorney had succeeded to his business; and to this gentleman I repaired. On making my object known, he proceeded to search amongst some old papers which had belonged to his predecessor; and there he discovered the original draft of the will, and such particulars as enabled us

in the course of that day to trace out the two persons who had witnessed it. There was consequently no difficulty in taking out a probate in the Diocesan Court; and this was done on the ensuing day.

My business with the attorney being thus completed, I was returning to the *Fountain Hotel* at about four o'clock in the afternoon, resolving to repair to London on the following morning,—when I suddenly heard my name ejaculated forth in a voice of mingled surprise and satisfaction: and the next moment my hand was grasped by Mr. Tufnell, Sir Aubrey Clavering's steward.

"This is indeed most fortunate, Miss Price!" he exclaimed: "it is truly providential! You will be amazed when I tell you that I was about to proceed post-haste up to London in search after you."

"I am indeed amazed at such intelligence," was my response. "But for what purpose?"

"Sir Aubrey is dying," he answered quickly: "and he begs and entreats that you will repair to him: for he has matters of the utmost importance to communicate. I know not what they are: but this much I do know—that they have reference to those letters and documents which, as you may remember, I told you the last time we met were discovered in a secret recess behind the late Sir Wyndham's picture."

The conviction instantaneously flashed to my mind that the communication Sir Aubrey Clavering had to make was connected with my mother; and for a few minutes I was almost overpowered by the gush of mingled feelings and associations that surged up within me. Mr. Tufnell, thinking that I hesitated to comply with his request, hastened to observe, "You need not fear, Miss Price, to accompany me to the Hall. Sir Aubrey has for a long time past been an altered man. This much I told you when last we met; and if he alludes to his evil conduct towards yourself a few years ago, it will be for the purpose of entreating your pardon."

"Mr. Tufnell," I said, "you mistake me—I do not hesitate: but certain thoughts arose in my mind—However, no matter—I will go with you whenever you choose."

"In the name of my dying master do I thank you—sincerely thank you!" replied the steward. "Come with me at once, I beseech you, Miss Price: for when I left him a couple of hours back, I thought to myself that on my return from London, no matter how short my stay there might be, I should find that he belonged no more to this world."

"Is he indeed past all hope?" I inquired, now experiencing a feeling of compassion for that man who thus in the spring-time of his years was being so prematurely cut off.

"He is past all hope," rejoined Tufnell: "he is in the last stage of consumption—the hand of death is already upon his countenance—and when I left the Hall just now, one of the physicians in attendance upon him, took me aside, saying with a solemn shake of the head, 'I do not think that you will ever again behold your master alive.'"

"Then I will go with you this moment," I said. "How shall we proceed thither?"

"I came across from the Hall in a phaeton, which has not yet gone back. If, as I presume, you are staying at the *Fountain*, I will come and fetch you in half-an-hour."

"I shall be ready," was my answer: and Mr.

Tufnell at once hurried away. I entered the hotel: dinner was at once served up; but I could not eat a mouthful—so great was the suspense I experienced as to what the nature of the communication I was about to receive from Sir Aubrey Clavering, could possibly be. I thought it an age till Mr. Tufnell appeared in the phaeton, which one of Sir Aubrey's livery-servants was driving. I ascended into the vehicle, which immediately drove away. But little was said during the drive to the Hall, which was only three miles from Canterbury; and as I alighted at the entrance of that handsome dwelling, I thought within myself that when I was last there I little imagined I should ever set foot within its walls again.

I was conducted into one of the splendidly furnished parlours; and Mr. Tufnell left me for the purpose of ascending to the chamber of his dying master, to acquaint him with my arrival. In about ten minutes he returned to the parlour, and requested me to follow him. I asked how Sir Aubrey now was; and the steward replied that he was evidently sinking. As I ascended the spacious staircase and threaded the corridor leading to Sir Aubrey's chamber, I could not help thinking how strange it was that circumstances were thus bringing me to the death-bed of him who at one part of my life had been a bitter persecutor and the source of much suffering to me. But not the slightest sentiment of animosity existed in my mind towards that man. No—it had given place some time back to a feeling of compassion for his mutilated person, his desponding state of mind, and his declining health.

Tufnell knocked gently at a door at the end of the passage. It was opened by an elderly and respectable-looking female, whom I afterwards discovered to be the housekeeper; and she at once gave me admittance. Mr. Tufnell did not enter the room with me: but a physician and the surgeon belonging to Sturry,—who attended upon Lady Talbot at the time of the accident to the carriage,—were there, seated by the couch in which Sir Aubrey Clavering lay. He motioned for both the medical men and the housekeeper to withdraw; and I was now alone with him. Oh! how altered was he from the time when I had first known him:—how altered, too, even from what he was when I had last seen him—which was at Herne Bay. He was but thirty-two or thirty-three years of age; and he looked fifty. His hair, once of raven darkness, was streaked with silver: his face was not merely haggard—it was almost fleshless, as if there were naught but skin upon the bones: his eyes, dark as his hair was wont to be, had lost their lustre, and were glazing under the touch of death. His lips were white; and the fine teeth gleaming between them, added to the ghastliness of his look. The reader already knows that he had lost his right arm, having had it amputated in consequence of the wound received in the duel with Captain Tollenmache: his left hand was so emaciated that it seemed as if every nerve, fibre, and sinew might be counted. He was propped up with pillows;—and there, in a couch adorned with sumptuous hangings, and in a chamber furnished in the most luxurious way, was this man—still so young, not having yet reached the prime of life—stretched helplessly and hopelessly, and as it were already looking Death face to face!

I had of course expected to find him much altered,

but not so terribly changed as I thus beheld him. I therefore experienced a powerful shock on entering that chamber; and notwithstanding all I had endured at his hands in other times, the tears trickled down my cheeks: for there was something dreadful, as well as painfully touching, in this spectacle of human decay. He saw that I was affected: he himself was affected likewise—he could not immediately speak: but he slowly raised his thin pale hand and extended it towards me. I hastened to take it as an evidence that all the past was forgiven. Then I beheld the tears trickling down *his* face also; and their glistening gave a temporary lustre to the eyes that were growing glassy with approaching dissolution.

"You have come, Mary," he said in a low feeble voice; "and if I call you now by your Christian name, it is because in my last moments I wish to be to you what I never was before—namely, a friend. I will not ask you to forgive and forget the past: I see that you have already done so. Nor must I waste precious time in useless observations. I have but a few days—perhaps only a few hours to live: but my soul has made its peace with heaven, and I am resigned to meet death, come when he may. Take this key, Mary," he added, producing a small one from beneath his pillow; "and open that writing-desk."

The desk which he indicated, stood upon a table near the bed, and on which there were likewise several bottles of medicine, crystal jugs of cooling beverages, a bible, and a prayer-book. I opened the desk; and he bade me look in a particular compartment.

"Do you not see two packets, both sealed and addressed to yourself?"

"Yes," I answered. "Here they are:"—and I drew them forth with trembling hands, for I was nervous—agitated—full of suspense.

"You perceive," continued Sir Aubrey Clavering, "that the larger packet has *Number One* upon it, and the smaller *Number Two*. Now attend to what I am going to say. It is my purpose to relate to you a certain history connected with the deceased members of the family to which I belong. All the letters and documents which constitute the basis of that history, and from which indeed it is taken, are contained in the packet marked *Number One*. Now, if the hand of Death should interrupt me ere the completion of the narrative whereon I am about to enter, I enjoin you, Mary Price, to peruse the papers contained in the packet thus marked *Number One* before you open that which is marked *Number Two*:"—then after a pause, he added, "I must inform you that of the narrative I am about to commence, I myself was utterly ignorant until two years ago, when it was revealed to my knowledge by the accidental discovery of those papers whereof I have been speaking, and which are contained in the packet marked *Number One*. Sit down on this chair by the bedside—and give me your attention."

I did so; and it was with a sensation of solemn awe that I prepared to listen to the narrative about to be commenced: for the conviction was deep in my soul that it was to my deceased mother the revelations would have more or less reference. Sir Aubrey Clavering appeared to be collecting all his last remaining energies for the task on which he

was about to enter; and his voice, as he commenced his narrative, was stronger than it had as yet been since I first entered his chamber.

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

"I AM about to direct your attention, Mary," began Sir Aubrey Clavering, "to a period of about twenty-nine years ago. At that time Sir Wyndham Clavering—my deceased cousin—was a young man, residing here at the Hall with his mother. I must inform you that his father had died when Wyndham was in his infancy; and it was generally believed that he perished of a broken heart in consequence of certain irregularities which came to his knowledge in respect to his wife, Lady Clavering. Her ladyship was a woman of exceeding beauty—of a glowing temperament and strong passions, the license of which she had not moral principle enough to curb. You have seen her portrait in the gallery of this mansion: Tufnell told me three years back of the accident which brought you hither. Well then, that portrait, though taken when Lady Clavering was verging upon fifty, must have shown you that in her youth she was eminently beautiful, but that the effects of her ungovernable passions were imprinted on her features. On this subject I need not however now dwell; but will continue the thread of my narrative.

"Twenty-nine years ago, as I began by stating, Sir Wyndham Clavering dwelt at the Hall with his mother. He was a fine, tall, handsome young man; and being possessed of an estate and fortune producing him thirteen thousand a year, was naturally sought after by all families in which there were marriageable daughters. As a matter of course, one so favoured by nature and by circumstances was bound to have aspired to a brilliant alliance: but Sir Wyndham was always of a peculiar disposition even from his boyhood—he had no pride of rank or riches—he disliked society—and he had a profound contempt for those beauties who threw themselves in his way in the hope of ensnaring his heart. One day, about the time of which I am speaking—namely, twenty-nine years ago—Sir Wyndham, having ridden over to Canterbury on a little business, was strolling forth on foot in the adjacent fields, to indulge in one of those solitary rambles to which he was so much attached,—when he beheld, walking a little way in front, a young female whose exquisite figure struck him with a degree of interest he had seldom before felt towards the sex. He quickened his pace—he passed her—and the feeling already excited, was enhanced into mingled admiration and pleasure on perceiving that the countenance of this young person well befitted the symmetry of her shape. Never had Sir Wyndham Clavering beheld so beauteous a face: it was more than beautiful—it was handsome. I am not about to pause to inquire whether the idea of love at first sight be fiction or fact: but certain it is that Sir Wyndham felt himself irresistibly attracted towards the object of his admiration. To be brief, he formed her acquaintance. She doubtless saw that there was something magnanimous and sincere in his disposition, honourable in his motives, and respect-

ful in his conduct—or else her own modest dignity and rectitude of principle would not have permitted her to dispense with the forms of a proper introduction. Not that she was a lady in rank, though assuredly she was such in gracefulness of mien, gentility of manners, and intellectual acquirements. She told Sir Wyndham that she dwelt with an aunt who resided at a neat little dwelling on the outskirts of the city—that she had never known her parents—that this aunt had reared her from her infancy—and that they kept a preparatory day-school for the young daughters of tradesmen, from which avocation they derived a competency. The aunt was well stricken in years, and now paid little attention to the school, the main charge of which consequently devolved upon the niece,—who, I should observe, bore the name of Marietta. It was not on the first, nor even on the second or third occasion when Sir Wyndham encountered the object of his admiration, that she gave him these particulars: but they were detailed by degrees during several interviews. For the damsel was averse to meet Sir Wyndham clandestinely; while on the other hand she was afraid to receive him at the house. However, yielding to his earnest entreaties, she did continue to meet him, day after day, during the brief half-hours she could snatch from her duties to the school and her attentions to Mrs. Burgess, which was the name of her aunt. Sir Wyndham used no disguise with her: he told her who he was—he mentioned his rank, his birth, his fortune, his abode; and in a short time, when thoroughly convinced that the propriety of her conduct and the excellence of her disposition were equal to her beauty, he offered her his hand. She loved him—loved him,—dearly loved him, with all the earnestness, the pathos, and the fervour of a young heart's first affection: for she had never known love before, and her age was but eighteen. She knew that he was sincere in the proffer he thus made: and her gratitude, emanating from her love, was expressed with a joyousness only subdued by maiden modesty. But yet she trembled to reveal all this to her aunt,—not because Mrs. Burgess was severe; for, on the contrary, she was the kindest of women: but because Marietta hesitated to confess to her kind protectress that thus for many weeks she had been secretly affording interviews to a suitor.

“Sir Wyndham Clavering took upon himself the task of avowing everything to Mrs. Burgess; and bidding Marietta await him in the field where this scene took place, and where their stolen interviews were wont to be held, he proceeded to the house. Being introduced to Mrs. Burgess, who received him in a neat little parlour, Sir Wyndham Clavering frankly announced who he was; and in the same spirit of manly openness, he confessed his passion for Marietta and his honourable intentions with regard to her. Mrs. Burgess was well pleased with the young Baronet's candour, and likewise at the prospect of so brilliant an alliance on behalf of the young damsel whom she had reared as her niece. For the worthy woman's niece Marietta was *not*. A profound mystery hung over her birth—a mystery which Mrs. Burgess had never as yet revealed to Marietta's ears,—but which now, from a sense of duty towards the damsel's admirer, she thought it no longer expedient to conceal. Sir

Wyndham listened with the deepest interest and attention; and the substance of Mrs. Burgess's story was as follows.

“It appeared that some twenty years back, her husband died suddenly; and his affairs proving to be insolvent, she was left entirely to her own resources. The consequence was that she fell into great pecuniary difficulties in her endeavours to establish a little school as the means of subsistence. She had a good friend in a medical gentleman who had been intimate with her deceased husband; and this gentleman one day propounded to her a means by which she might obtain a sum of money to relieve herself from difficulties and carry out her scholastic views. A lady of his acquaintance was about to become a mother; and as her child would be born in shame, there were the most cogent reasons for concealing the circumstance of her frailty. As a matter of course, the surgeon did not mention any names: but he explained that if Mrs. Burgess would take the child so soon as it was born (provided it lived), and if she would bring it up, the sum of five hundred pounds would be paid her. The offer was accepted; and one night, about ten days after this conversation, the surgeon brought the newly-born child, carefully enveloped, to Mrs. Burgess's house. The stipulated sum was duly paid; and the worthy woman passed off her little charge as a niece whom the death of its parents had thrown upon her hands. About a year after this occurrence, the medical gentleman died; and the name of the lady—Marietta's mother—continued unknown to Mrs. Burgess. During the long interval which had elapsed since Marietta was consigned to her charge—an interval of eighteen years—no inquiry had ever been made concerning her: no interest had been displayed on her behalf—no additional pecuniary succour had been sent; and thus it was but too clear that either the authors of Marietta's being were no more, or that they had decided upon completely ignoring her existence.

“Such was the tale which Mrs. Burgess told Sir Wyndham Clavering. He expressed his gratitude for her candour: but of course the circumstances thus revealed, made no alteration in his feelings or intentions towards Marietta. Mrs. Burgess cheerfully gave her assent to the proposed union; and Sir Wyndham, hastening back to the spot where he had left the damsel, acquainted her with everything that had passed. Then Marietta learnt for the first time that so far from being the niece of Mrs. Burgess, no tie of relationship subsisted between them at all; and she wept at the thought of having been so cruelly abandoned by the mother who gave her birth. Sir Wyndham conducted her back home, and passed the remainder of that day in company with his intended wife and the excellent-hearted Mrs. Burgess. It was arranged that the nuptials should be celebrated in two months' time, in order that the school might be broken up when the term of the vacation came; as Mrs. Burgess was averse to have this step taken abruptly. Those were two months of indescribable bliss for Sir Wyndham Clavering and the beauteous Marietta. Every day did he ride over from the Hall to Canterbury, to pass an hour or two in her society; and the more they saw of each other, the stronger became their affection. Sir Wyndham did not immediately communicate to his mother his

proposed alliance. In the first place she went away, just at this period, on a visit of a few weeks to some friends in London; and secondly, as Sir Wyndham foresaw that she would object to his marriage with one whom she would consider so much below himself, he postponed the announcement until nearly the last moment. Not that he had any consent to ask on the part of his parent; for he was of age and his own master: but she was a woman of violent temper, and he apprehended a terrific explosion of fury on her part. At length the time came when the revelation must be made. It only wanted a week to the day fixed for the nuptials; and Lady Clavering had just come back from London. Preparations must be made at the Hall for the reception of the bride. It was in the evening, after dinner on the day of her ladyship's return, that Sir Wyndham began to broach the subject. He said that he had at length encountered one who was in every way calculated to ensure his happiness: he dwelt upon her beauty—the excellence of her character—the stainless purity of her conduct—her mental acquirements—and her gentility of manner, which was above her position in life: but he said nothing connected with the mystery of her birth—he considered it unnecessary. Lady Clavering, a thorough woman of the world, soon perceived by her son's manner and speech that his intended wife was of a grade much inferior to his own. She insisted upon farther particulars,—reminding Sir Wyndham that he had not even as yet mentioned the name of her who had captivated his heart. That name was mentioned—*Marietta Burgess*! Lady Clavering became ghastly pale, and looked confounded. Still her son entertained not any suspicion beyond the idea that his mother was maddened with a rage to which she dared not give vent. He went on speaking,—describing how Mrs. Burgess had honourably supported herself for many years by a preparatory school, and how Marietta had for some time past proved a most effective assistant. Then Lady Clavering enjoined her son, with mingled vehemence, passion, and entreaty, not to contract the contemplated marriage. He gently but firmly reminded her of his right to consult his own happiness. Her excitement became fearful: at one moment she raved wildly—at another she fell upon her knees at his feet, imploring in anguished terms that he would renounce Marietta Burgess. But no. Great as was the affliction which the scene caused him to experience, he could not for a moment think of proving faithless to his vows and stamping his own unhappiness, in mere obedience to what he conceived to be his mother's proud and selfish views. Her excitement redoubled: fresh prayers, mingled with menaces—fresh entreaties, blended with curses to be invoked on his head if he disobeyed her! But still Wyndham Clavering was firm. Then the wretched woman, finding that all she said proved unavailing, was forced to confess the terrible and startling truth: for Marietta Burgess was her own daughter—the fruit of an illicit amour carried on in Wyndham's childhood, and which was totally unsuspected by all the world at the time, save by those persons whom it was requisite to admit to her confidence.

"Sir Wyndham Clavering was overwhelmed with feelings which may be more easily conceived than

described. Shame and abhorrence on account of his mother's frailty—horror at the idea of having regarded his own half-sister with such a love—despair at this sudden annihilation of his happiness,—these were the emotions predominant in his heart. He retired to his chamber; and throughout that night he paced it to and fro like a perturbed spirit that could obtain no repose. In the morning he was seized with illness: fever attacked him—and for three months did he hover between life and death,—alternating from the ravings of delirium to the stupor of unconsciousness. At length his intellect returned; and he awoke to the recollection of the past. But he had been there—stretched on that bed—three whole months! What must his Marietta have thought? had she sent to make inquiries? what steps had the aunt taken to ascertain the cause of his absence and his silence? These were the queries which he was anxious to put to whomsoever could answer them. His mother made her appearance in the sick-room: the attendants were ordered to withdraw—and to her did he address those questions. He instantaneously saw by her manner that she had something to relate—he was smitten with the conviction that something had taken place. Thoroughly mistrusting her now, he insisted upon being told everything, under the threat of revealing all to his valet and empowering him to go and see Marietta. Lady Clavering, horrified at the idea of having the story of her shame made known to a menial, was compelled to be explicit. Mrs. Burgess was dead—Marietta had gone away from the neighbourhood of Canterbury. But how? under what circumstances? Sir Wyndham Clavering insisted upon knowing; and by the terrorism of the same threat previously held out, he succeeded in eliciting some particulars, as to the course his mother had adopted while he was stretched in unconsciousness on that couch. But the full extent of her proceedings he did not learn till some time afterwards. However, I will explain in full what Lady Clavering did do. On the day on which her son was first stricken down by fever, she repaired to Canterbury and presented herself at Mrs. Burgess's house. As a matter of course, in announcing herself as Lady Clavering, she did not reveal the secret that she was Marietta's mother—nor did she exhibit the slightest maternal interest on behalf of the young damsel. But she overwhelmed them both with the bitterest reproaches for having, as she termed it, inveigled her son into a promise of marriage: she assured them that by her arguments she had brought him to reason—that he had sent her to break off the match—and that they must never hope to see him again, for that if they dared present themselves at the Hall, the door would be closed in their faces. Having thus acquitted herself—behaving throughout the interview in the most violent manner—Lady Clavering took her departure. Mrs. Burgess, who was in a very weak state of health at the time, received such a shock that she at once took to her bed—and in less than a week was a corpse. Marietta,—who, throughout the scene with Lady Clavering, had observed a dignified calmness,—nerved herself with a becoming fortitude to meet the terrific blow thus dealt at her heart. She believed that she had heard the truth—that Sir Wyndham had repented of what he had been led to re-



gard as his rashness and folly—and that he had renounced her. How could she think otherwise than that it was the truth? When Lady Clavering was gone, her feelings found relief in tears: the outpouring was long and violent;—but afterwards she wept no more. She resolved to bear her lot with courage and with resignation. Day and night did she minister at the death-bed of her only friend, who breathed her last in her arms. She followed her remains to the grave; and then she indeed felt herself to be alone. Lady Clavering did not fail to make inquiries as to what the Burgesses were doing; and thus she learnt of the old woman's death. She then paid a second visit to Marietta; and adopting a more conciliatory tone and manner than at first, offered her a sum of money if she would leave the neighbourhood. Marietta repelled the pecuniary proposal with dignified firmness—but assured her ladyship that she had no cause to apprehend any endeavour on her part to win back

her son to her presence, as she had resolved of her own accord to seek her livelihood elsewhere. Lady Clavering, inwardly rejoiced at these words, took her departure; and at the expiration of another week, when secretly making fresh inquiries, she found that Marietta had left Canterbury, and had gone no one knew whither.

"It was the merest outline of these circumstances which Sir Wyndham Clavering now obtained from his mother. He did not reproach her: he thoroughly despised her;—indeed he was almost led to hate and abhor the presence of his own parent. When he rose from his sick bed he repaired to Canterbury—he instituted inquiries after Marietta—but he could not obtain the slightest trace to the direction she had taken. Need I say that he became an altered man—that the iron of affliction had penetrated deep into his soul—and that he felt that his earthly happiness was wrecked, never to be restored? Two years elapsed—and at the

expiration of that time, business one day took Sir Wyndham across to Ashford. As he was passing through the churchyard on foot, to call upon the rector of the parish whose house was situate on the outskirts of the town, he suddenly encountered Marietta. She would have passed him by in coldness and in silence: but he conjured her to stop and hear him, for that his conduct had not only been grossly misrepresented, but that he had a secret of the utmost importance to reveal. She did stop: and he then made her acquainted with everything,—how on avowing to his mother his contemplated alliance, he had discovered the mystery of her birth—how for three months he had been stretched on a bed of sickness, insensible to everything that was passing around—and how, when he awoke to consciousness, he had extorted from Lady Clavering a confession of as much of her own proceedings as she had chosen to reveal. Marietta was astounded at all these things: but while on the one hand she was rejoiced to find that Sir Wyndham Clavering had not proved unworthy of her good opinion, she was on the other hand cruelly afflicted by the detestable conduct of her own mother. Then Sir Wyndham, reminding her that he looked upon her as a sister, and would ever love and cherish her as such, besought her to allow him to place her in a position of affluence and ease. But this she firmly but gratefully declined; and then she told her own tale. She recited all those particulars of Lady Clavering's violent conduct which her ladyship had left unsaid in her explanations to her son; and she went on to narrate how she had come to fix her abode at Ashford—how illness and poverty had overtaken her—and how she had at length listened to the addresses of a respectable young man, though in a humble position—and that she had become his wife. The name of that young man was Robert Price.

"Sir Wyndham urged and entreated that Marietta would allow him to see her husband—to explain everything—and to raise them to opulence: but she would not consent. She refused upon principle; and she insisted that Sir Wyndham Clavering would seek to see her no more. She represented that her husband was a worthy and excellent young man—that he loved her dearly—and though the susceptibility of love in that same sense was dead in her own heart, she nevertheless esteemed him; and for these considerations she would not for worlds do aught that should cause him uneasiness. Sir Wyndham understood her. With whatsoever feelings of delicacy and sanctity she might regard the tie of relationship which existed between herself and Sir Wyndham, the world—even if the secret of her birth were made known—would not consider it as a sufficient barrier to shield her virtue: whereas, on the other hand, if the secret were *not* made known, how could she accept boons at Sir Wyndham's hands without provoking the whisperings of scandal? Besides, she urged that for their mother's sake the secret of her own birth *must* be kept; and thus did she exhibit a magnanimous consideration for that mother who had shown none for her. Sir Wyndham Clavering was unable to overrule her objections—unable to move her from her purpose: and they separated.

"Years passed on—and Sir Wyndham Clavering remained unmarried. Never could he love again: the image of Marietta was indelibly impressed upon

his heart; and the love that he cherished for her was of the holiest and most sanctified character—that of a brother towards a sister, with an added fervour and a more romantic depth. Years, I say, passed; and from time to time—but only at long intervals—did Sir Wyndham Clavering repair to Ashford and endeavour to persuade Marietta to consent that he should place herself, her husband, and her growing family in a state of affluence. But she remained firm to her settled purpose; and she reproached him for intruding, by his presence or his letters, on the even tenor of her existence. Thus did time wear on, until eight years ago, when Lady Clavering breathed her last; and shortly afterwards—indeed within a few weeks—my unfortunate cousin Sir Wyndham was dragged a corpse out of the waters of the Stour. That he perished an unhappy suicide, I have every reason to believe: and no wonder, inasmuch as life had long been a burden unto him."

CHAPTER CLIX.

SIR AUBREY'S LAST WORDS TO ME.

THE reader may conceive the mingled feelings with which I had listened to this narrative,—grief, infinite grief for the sorrows my poor mother had endured—but joy unspeakable to discover that her virtue was immaculate. Oh, my beloved mother! what tears, what bitter tears I shed as I thought that for a long time past I had believed her guilty! In my mind I had dishonoured her—in my soul I had desecrated her,—and she peerless in all womanly excellences! How profoundly—Oh! how profoundly did I thank heaven, even while Sir Aubrey Clavering was yet continuing his story, for this revelation of my mother's innocence; and when he had concluded, I sank down upon my knees by the side of the bed. I wept abundantly—my soul sent upward the silent eloquence of its prayer—and it was sweet to be enabled to think of my mother as an angel of purity looking down upon me from that sphere whither only angels such as she could go. And I took Sir Aubrey Clavering's hand—and I pressed it in the fervour of grateful acknowledgment for the intelligence he had imparted; and he himself was deeply affected, as he said murmuringly, "Mary, I shall die in peace, now that in the last moments of my life I am enabled to make atonement for the villany of my conduct towards you in times past."

"Speak of it not, Sir Aubrey Clavering!" I exclaimed, rising from my knees. "I myself had ceased to think of it all, even before you commenced your revelations: but now that you have proved to me the innocence of that mother whom for certain reasons I had suspected, you have more than atoned for the past—you have laid me under an immensity of obligation!"

I filled a tumbler with a cooling beverage, and placed it to his lips: for his tongue was parched with so much speaking. Then I sat down again by the side of the couch; and I said, "There is one mystery unknown to you, which I, alas! am painfully enabled to clear up. You imagine that your cousin the late Sir Wyndham Clavering perished as a suicide—it was not so!"

I then related to the wondering and interested Baronet all those circumstances connected with my mother's death—the letter with the black seal, and the scene which Mad Tommy had beheld on the bank of the river. Word for word did I repeat the contents of that letter with the black seal: for, Oh! they were indelibly impressed upon my memory. How well they corroborated the truth of the narrative I had just heard! how admirably did that letter fit in as a link of the chain of circumstances which explained the past! Oh, well indeed might the unfortunate Sir Wyndham, when writing to my mother of that *past*, in the memorable letter with the black seal, have adjured her to believe, *by all its wild and tender recollections—by all its romantic and pathetic associations—by all the mystery of that link which bound his memory to her image, that he was incapable of planting a dagger in her heart!*

"And you tell me," said Sir Aubrey, "that your poor father still lives—and that you saw him yesterday? Ah, he was not to be blamed—or at least scarcely so—for the deed which he perpetrated. Believing himself dishonoured, it was a just vengeance that he thought himself wreaking. But you can find him out, Mary—you can tell him that his wife was an angel of innocence! The journals and letters of my late cousin, which you will find in one of those packets, corroborate every particular of the tale I have told you. And now I feel that I am growing faint—"

"Speak no more, Sir Aubrey," I said, in a gentle voice: "you have perhaps already spoken too much."

"No matter, Mary," he answered, his accents regaining a certain degree of firmness: "I must give utterance to what I was about to say. A great change has come over me within the last three years. A circumstance,"—and he glanced towards the remnant of his right arm,—"*compelled me to withdraw myself from the world; and in the seclusion of this Hall better thoughts entered my mind than I had ever before experienced. I am not ashamed to say that I repented of the past—that I deplored those years, brief though they were, which I had spent in pleasure and dissipation. I often thought of you, Mary. I knew not at first how it was—but there seemed to be some mysterious link between us; and while I rejoiced that you had escaped my villanous designs, I thought to myself that your pardon, if I could obtain it, would be sweet. Then accident suddenly put me in possession of the secret papers left behind by my deceased cousin. Oh! when I gathered thence the complete narrative of the past, as I have this evening revealed it to you, I shuddered at the idea that I should ever have persecuted the daughter of the unhappy Marietta. But I vowed to make an atonement; and in so doing, would more than carry out the intentions of my deceased cousin, because circumstances afforded me greater scope to do so. For whereas, as I gleaned from his papers, it was his intention to bestow all his disposable property—that is to say, his money in the funds—upon his half-sister Marietta, or her children, I am enabled to bequeath it all in the same direction: for the entail of the estates ceases when there shall be no male heir—and such is the position now. The blood of the Claverings rolls in your veins, Mary Price; and therefore have*

I willed unto you—and, for many reasons, to you alone—the Hall and the domain of my ancestors. This is the atonement for a long time past I have resolved to make unto you. May heaven give you long life and health to enjoy your fortune: for in a short time the cold hand of Death will be laid upon me—and then will you find yourself the heiress to thirteen thousand a year!"

I was almost overpowered by this announcement, which showed how much real goodness—how much true magnanimity, must have ever existed in the soul of that man, though so long latent, and only developed by circumstances in the latter portion of his short life. I could not speak: I was a prey to a variety of feelings which almost suffocated me. Again he extended his hand: I took it—and he pressed mine, as he again wished me health and happiness. Then he said, but with some little degree of hesitation, "Pardon me for asking the question—it is because at this supreme moment I regard you with a brother's interest—but tell me, are you still engaged to Eustace Quentin?"

I replied that I was, and that in a year's time our nuptials were to be celebrated.

"Say everything kind to Eustace from me," continued the dying Baronet: "of *him* also I have much to be forgiven—but I know the excellence of his heart, and I feel that I *am* forgiven!"

"Yes, yes—rest assured that you are!" I responded, much affected. "Sincerely can I promise you this on his behalf!"

"And now, one word more, Mary," resumed Sir Aubrey; and his voice again grew faint. "In one of those packets you will find my will: amongst other things, it expresses a particular wish. It is that as you inherit the domain, so you will take the name of Clavering, annexing it to your own. A year, you tell me, is to elapse ere you become the happy bride of Eustace Quentin. For that year, therefore, will you bear the name of Clavering. And now, Mary," he added, "we must part. Never more shall I behold you again in this world! My days—perhaps my very hours are numbered: and rest assured that with my latest breath I shall invoke renewed blessings upon your head."

Once more I took his hand—I knelt down by the side of the couch: for some minutes I prayed for him—but not aloud. Yet he understood full well that it was so; and in a voice faint with emotions, he expressed his gratitude. I then issued forth from the chamber of the dying Baronet; and encountering the housekeeper upon the landing, bade her return thither. A footman conducted me to the drawing-room, where a table with refreshments had been spread during my interview with Sir Aubrey: but I needed none. I desired to be left alone: and then I gave free vent to my feelings of mingled joy and pain, in a copious flood of tears. In about a quarter of an hour Mr. Tufnell entered to announce that the carriage was in readiness to take me back to the *Fountain* in Canterbury: I accordingly descended the staircase—entered the vehicle—and in a short half-hour alighted at the hotel.

It was now eight o'clock in the evening; and retiring at once to my bed-chamber, I proceeded to examine the packets which I had brought away with me from Clavering Hall. I first opened that marked *Number One*—and found it to contain, as I had been given to understand, several copies of letters

and a journal kept by the late Sir Wyndham Clavering. Two or three of the letters were the rough draughts of communications addressed to his mother, whom, it would appear, he had positively refused to see for the first few weeks after that interview with my own mother—the unfortunate Marietta—at Ashford, on which occasion he learnt full particulars of the treatment she and Mrs. Burgess had experienced at her ladyship's hands. It seemed that Sir Wyndham remained away from the Hall at a friend's house a few miles distant, positively refusing to return home so long as his mother was there. Hence the correspondence which had passed between them: Lady Clavering's letters were in the packet: they entreated her son's forgiveness—implored him to return, that the scandal of exposure might be avoided in respect to herself. The copies of Sir Wyndham's replies were also there; and the whole correspondence, together with the entries in the journal, formed the basis of the narrative I had heard, and corroborated every detail of it. There were likewise copies of several letters which at long intervals Sir Wyndham had written to my mother, all entreating that she would permit him to communicate the past to her husband, reveal himself as a relative and a friend, and place them in a position of affluence. Then too there were the replies to these letters, in the well-known and beautiful handwriting of my mother,—expressing her gratitude for the offers thus made, but reiterating her firm resolve to retain her present position, and to keep the secret of her first affection altogether from her husband. These letters were fraught with a delicacy of feeling, a purity of sentiment, and a moral strength of purpose, which corroborated the highest estimate I had ever formed of my mother's character before my suspicions were so unfortunately raised by the tragedy which had snatched her from me. I should add, in order to render the preceding explanations as complete as possible, that after the expiration of a few weeks, Sir Wyndham Clavering had yielded to his mother's earnest entreaties, and had returned to the Hall: but in the letter wherein he expressed his intention to do so, he frankly and candidly gave her to understand that he made this concession merely to save her from the world's suspicions which she dreaded—for that his confidence in her was annihilated, his respect destroyed, his filial love irreparably impaired!

I opened the second packet, which was marked *Number Two*; and found Sir Aubrey Clavering's will, duly attested by a banker in Canterbury, and by Mr. Crosby, his solicitor in London. There were a few legacies, to Mr. Tufnell, the housekeeper, and two or three other persons, amounting altogether to a couple of thousand pounds: but the Hall and estate, together with a large sum of money in the funds, were bequeathed to me. Certain injunctions were given—but no actual conditions imposed. These injunctions were that I was not to dispose of the estate, nor to sell out the money in the funds—nor in any way to alienate any portion of the property—but to consider it as a heritage wholly and solely for myself, and for the issue that might proceed from any matrimonial alliance I might form. Furthermore, in case of such marriage, I was to have my own property settled upon myself; and the meaning of these injunctions was explained by the desire of the testator to ensure me a firm position

in wealth and prosperity against the vicissitudes and casualties of life. There was likewise a wish expressed that I should take the name of Clavering, adding it to my own. Instructions were given in respect to the funeral of the testator, which it was his desire should take place without pomp or ceremony, and that he should be buried in the family vault at Sturry Church.

A long letter, addressed to myself, was enclosed in the packet containing the will. It was written some weeks back, and intended for me in case Sir Aubrey Clavering might not see me before his death. It spoke of his desire to make atonement for the past—of his repentance for his own misdeeds—of his admiration for my character, which he had been brought to appreciate—and of the consolation it afforded him, when hastening to the grave, to know that he was thus making provision for one in whose veins the blood of the Claverings flowed.

Profoundly solemn as well as affecting,—and strangely mingled with mournfulness and a holy joy,—were the feelings which filled my soul. That Fortune thus destined me to become the heiress of a fine estate and noble revenue, entered but little into that sentiment of joy: it was experienced on account of the revelations I had received in respect to my mother's innocence. But the mournfulness that I felt—Oh! that was on account of her sufferings, so strange and romantic, but not the less acute for all the wild interest of her early love,—mournfulness, too, on account of the fearful error under which my father had laboured concerning her,—and mournfulness also that I had ever yielded myself up to suspicions so derogatory in respect to a parent who was the pattern of every virtue. I thought likewise that if my poor brother Robert were alive, I might by means of the wealth which must soon fall into my hands, place him in a position inaccessible to temptation;—and scalding tears rolled down my cheeks as I reflected on the frailty and dishonour of my sister Sarah. But I could not help being struck by the singularity of the coincidences which on the occasion of this journey into Kent had revealed so many things to my knowledge. The positive assurance I had received as to my father being alive—the discovery of the will at Mrs. Whitfield's house—the revelation of my mother's earlier history—and the knowledge that I was destined to be the heiress of the house of Clavering,—all these things had burst upon me as it were within the limited space of a few days.

I retired to bed; but many hours elapsed ere I could compose myself to sleep. I pondered over and over again upon the incidents which I have just summed up: I retrospected on all the occurrences of my eventful life—I reviewed the trials, the temptations, the calamities, and the vicissitudes, through which I had passed;—and feeling assured that fortune had taken a change, I breathed a fervent prayer of gratitude to heaven for thus affording me the prospect and the hope of a happier existence than I had as yet known. A few short years back, and I was a poor humble girl, seeking to earn the bread of industry as a servant in a family: *now* how changed was my position! Had I not sufficient to be thankful for? and could I not likewise look back upon enough to make me think to myself that if ever I should have leisure and inclination to commit my memoirs and experiences to paper, they would

form a book every page of which would illustrate the proverb that *truth is stranger than fiction*? In such varied and manifold thoughts as these, did I remain awake for some hours; and I heard the clock of the fine old cathedral strike two before slumber fell upon my eyes.

That night Sir Aubrey Clavering died; and when I awoke in the morning, it was to receive the intelligence which to me was an announcement that I was the heiress of thirteen thousand a-year.

CHAPTER CLX.

VARIOUS INCIDENTS.

It was the chambermaid of the hotel who brought me up these tidings at about eight o'clock. Mr. Tufnell was waiting below to see me. My toilet was soon completed: I was already in mourning for my deceased friend Laura—it was not necessary to take thought, therefore, for sombre garments on account of the death of him whose heiress I was. On descending to the parlour to which the worthy steward had been shown, I found myself treated with a degree of respect which at once proved that he knew he was standing in the presence of the new owner of Clavering Hall. His constraint pained me, because he had always evinced a degree of kindness towards me which would not for a moment permit me to treat him otherwise than as a faithful friend. I bade him sit down and tell me of his master's last moments. It appeared that Sir Aubrey's condition had become exceedingly alarming immediately after I had left the Hall: the over-exertion he had experienced in his long interview with me, had tended to enfeeble him—indeed, to prostrate him completely. The physician, the surgeon, and the housekeeper, as well as Tufnell himself, remained with him until the last:—until the last, too, was he sensible. He told them that he had nominated me his heiress: without entering into particular details, he intimated that I was to a certain extent a scion of the Clavering race; and that it was for this, as well as for other family reasons, that he had thus bequeathed his property to me. It was a few minutes before midnight that he expired,—without pain, and breathing a prayer in which my name was mentioned.

I now felt that I had a certain duty to perform, paramount above all others; and this was to superintend the arrangements for the funeral of the deceased, according to the terms dictated in his will. I therefore told Mr. Tufnell that I should at once accompany him to the Hall, and take up my temporary residence there. He intimated that having foreseen that such would be my intention, he had come over with the carriage, that it might convey me thither. Having partaken of some tea—for my heart was too full of varied emotions to permit an appetite for anything more substantial,—I entered the carriage and took my departure from the hotel. In half-an-hour the equipage entered upon the domain which was now my own. I cannot express the emotions which swelled up in my heart at the thought that this was the fact: it seemed to me like a dream! But little more than three years had elapsed since I had first visited this estate and set foot within that Hall as a servant in the house-

hold of Lady Talbot; now this estate and that Hall were mine. The carriage drove up to the door: the servants were all congregated at the entrance to receive me—but it was in profound silence, for there was a feeling of solemnity because death was in the house. I visited the chamber where the deceased lay; and it was with a sentiment of profound satisfaction that I observed the calm serene aspect of the countenance. I instructed Mr. Tufnell to give such orders for the funeral as should be compatible with the written desire of the deceased; and then I sat down in one of the spacious drawing-rooms of the Hall, and penned several letters.

I wrote to Eustace Quentin—to my brother William—to Jane—to Mrs. Kingston—and to Sybilla. I told them all the wondrous things which had occurred during the last few days, and how a remarkable change had taken place in my position. I enclosed to William an advertisement which I desired him to insert in all the newspapers, entreating our father (should it meet his eye) to communicate with me immediately, inasmuch as I had the most important revelations to make. As a matter of course this advertisement was so ambiguously worded as to be unintelligible to the public generally. There was another advertisement which I sent at the same time, and which was drawn up with equal caution and mystery. It was addressed to Sarah, imploring her likewise to communicate with me, as a certain document closely regarding her interests, had been discovered. The return of post brought me letters in response to all my own correspondence; and I need scarcely observe that they contained the sincerest congratulations in respect to the wealth which fortune had showered upon my head.

At the expiration of a week the funeral of Sir Aubrey Clavering took place; and his remains were consigned to the family vault in the church at Sturry. On the following day I took my departure from the Hall for the metropolis,—a niece of Mr. Tufnell accompanying me in the capacity of lady's-maid. We journeyed in the travelling-carriage with post-horses; and reached London at about three o'clock in the afternoon. Fortunately Mrs. Chaplin had not as yet let the lodgings which I had occupied twelve days back; and therefore I was once again established in my old quarters. Scarcely had I alighted when I penned a hasty note to Barbauld Azetha, requesting that she would come to me immediately; and this I at once despatched by a messenger to the house in St. Giles's.

I had written to William and to Eustace on the previous day, to tell them when I should be in London, and informing them that if they did not find me at Mrs. Chaplin's, they would learn from her where I was staying. I had reached the metropolis two hours earlier than I had expected; and therefore they did not come till five o'clock: but punctual at that hour did they make their appearance. Need I say how rejoiced I was to see them again? or how they reiterated in words the congratulations which they had in the first instance forwarded by letter? But methought that when the first effusion of delight on the part of Eustace at this meeting was over, a shade of mournfulness gathered upon his countenance. I believe that William himself noticed it; and divining the cause, he with much delicate consideration afforded me an

opportunity of being alone with Eustace for a little while previous to dinner being announced. Pretending to have something to say to Mrs. Chaplin, he thus left us to ourselves in the drawing-room.

"Now, my dear Eustace," I at once said, as he took my hand and we gazed tenderly upon each other, "I am going to speak very candidly and frankly to you; because I see that something is troubling you. I can penetrate the reason—I understand all the delicacy of your mind. Eustace—dear Eustace, do you regret that circumstances have made me rich? Oh! I rejoice that it is so, on your account ten thousand times more than on my own: because you have made so many and so great sacrifices for me—"

"But, dearest Mary," he interrupted me, "though not for a single instant did I suppose that this accession of wealth on your part would make any difference in the noble attachment you bear towards me, and which constitutes the happiness and hope of my life—yet you can well understand that I should much rather have been able to lay my fortune at your feet—"

"O Eustace, speak not thus!" I exclaimed, the tears trickling down my cheeks: "what matters it on whose side the wealth exists? Let us thank heaven which thus places us beyond the reach of care and anxiety for the future on that score—And moreover," I added, thinking of all I could to soothe and cheer him, "how can your brother possibly refuse now to put you in possession of your own fortune?"

"True!" he ejaculated, with exultation. "Idiot that I was not to think of this before! Pardon me, dearest Mary, if for a moment I appeared even jealous of your prosperity: but it was because you had already done so much for me—I felt myself so deeply indebted towards you—Ah! I see that I pain you by these observations; and I am indeed wrong thus to speak. Forgive me, my own well-beloved Mary!"

"Forgive you, dear Eustace!" I murmured: "how can you use that word? You have not offended me."

We embraced affectionately; and smiles once more lighted up the handsome countenance of Captain Quentin. William returned to the apartment—dinner was soon announced to be in readiness—and we repaired to the dining-room, where we sat down, all three happy and cheerful. The messenger returned from St. Giles's while we were in the midst of the repast, and sent up to say that the person to whom the letter was addressed would be with me at nine o'clock in the evening. At that hour, punctual to her appointment, Barbauld Azetha arrived. Eustace and William remained together in the drawing-room, to which we had repaired after dinner to take coffee; and I received the Gipsy Queen alone in the dining-room.

"I know what you have to announce, Mary," she at once said: "Sir Aubrey Clavering is no more."

"You doubtless saw his death recorded in the newspaper-obituaries?" I observed.

"No—I never read them," responded Barbauld: "but I received a letter a week back, penned by his own hand, and stating that when it reached me I might know that he had ceased to exist; for that

he had confided it to his steward Mr. Tufnell to put into the post immediately after his demise."

"And that letter, Barbauld," I said, looking anxiously upon her countenance,—“has it disarmed you of any lingering resentment which you might have experienced towards the unfortunate and repentant Sir Aubrey Clavering?"

"Yes—Oh, yes!" she answered in a subdued voice; and as her eyes were bent downward, a deep shade of mournfulness came over her features. "Did you not notice, Mary, that I breathed his name—that name which I had vowed should never again pass my lips! But I *have* breathed it—I have broken that vow—and it is a proof that I am more than disarmed of any lingering resentment—Yes, I am not ashamed to confess my sorrow for the vengeance that I wreaked! But what is done cannot be recalled, much as it may be deplored. Sir Aubrey Clavering," she went on to observe, still in a tone of extreme mournfulness, "endeavoured in the last hours of his life to make me some reparation for the past. The letter which he penned besought my forgiveness, and expressed a fervent desire that happiness might await me. But this was not all: the letter contained a draught upon his London banker for five thousand pounds—a bequest which I was solemnly and sacredly adjured not to refuse. The money is dross: but the letter has affected me deeply. Yes, Aubrey!" she added, in a musing strain, "thou art forgiven—and now that thou art gone, I feel for thee a revival of that love wherewith thou didst once inspire me!"

She ceased—and for some minutes remained wrapped up in deep and melancholy reflection.

"You have not learnt, then," I at length said, "how Sir Aubrey Clavering behaved towards me? But no—you cannot have learnt it. I will now tell you all; and if I am about to reveal my poor mother's history," I added, looking her very hard in the face, "it is to prove to you the necessity of at once telling me where I may find my father."

Barbauld said nothing—but surveyed me attentively in her turn. I proceeded to put her in possession of all those circumstances in respect to my mother which I had learnt from the lips of Sir Aubrey Clavering, and which were corroborated by the documents in my possession: I told her how I was the heiress of the Clavering estate; and I wound up by informing her of the meeting with my father in the churchyard and at the deserted house in my native town of Ashford.

"After all that you have now said, Mary," observed the Gipsy Queen, who had listened to me in profound silence and with the deepest attention, "there is no longer any need for the maintenance of that mystery. First of all, let me offer my sincerest congratulations for this accession of fortune which you have experienced; and well assured am I that wealth cannot be in better hands. And now, Mary, in respect to your father, it is not necessary for me to confess that he still lives, because you have seen him: nor need I now deny that he and Graham are one and the same person. But do not blame me—"

"No, no—I will not blame you!" I interrupted her with feverish impatience. "Doubtless you will afford sufficient explanations for your studied perseverance in maintaining that mystery? But tell me where my father is—delay not in bringing us

together! It is the honour of his departed wife which has to be made apparent to him: it is the terrible idea of her infidelity of which he has to be disabused!"

"Believe me, dear Mary," answered Barbauld Azetha, "when I solemnly assure you that I know not at the present moment where your father is. I have not seen him for two weeks past. If I had, I should have known that he had thus encountered you at Ashford: but I was ignorant of the circumstance until I just now heard it from your lips. There can be no doubt that within a very short time I shall see him again; and rest assured that, with the joyous tidings I shall have to impart to his ears, there will be no difficulty in at once bringing you together. Oh, no!—for when he learns that you are indeed his daughter—his own child—and that he need no longer regard you as the living evidence of his wife's frailty and of his own dishonour, he will be all impatience to clasp you in his arms!"

"Foreseeing the probability of your not being immediately acquainted with my father's present abode," I said, "I caused advertisements to be inserted in the newspapers entreating him to communicate with me; and I named this house as the address to which he was to apply. But as yet I have received no intelligence from him. Have you no means of at once ascertaining where he is to be found? You can full well understand my anxiety—you can appreciate my feelings—"

"Yes, dear Mary—fully can I appreciate them," exclaimed the Gipsy Queen; "and if I knew where to discover your father, I would lose not an instant in repairing to him. But I do not. I however repeat that not many days can elapse before I shall see him again; and then rest assured that he will fly hither to embrace you."

"With this promise—and likewise in the hope that he may see the advertisements and thus hasten his return to London from wheresoever he may now be—I must remain satisfied. But you will not any longer hesitate to tell me all that regards him—how he has lived—how he came to harbour amongst your tribe—the inducement which led you to persevere so zealously in denying his existence—"

"Yes, I will tell you all," responded Barbauld. "For my own sake as well as your's, I will give you these explanations,—that I may not suffer in your opinion for the boldness and steady effrontery with which I on so many occasions persisted in returning a negative to the inquiries you put respecting your father. I must begin by informing you, Mary, that about eight years ago—in the summer-time of the year 1826—two men belonging to my tribe, were one evening walking along the bank of the river Stour in the neighbourhood of Ashford,—when they beheld a man struggling in the water. It was near the hour of sun-set, and still quite light. The men at once plunged in, and rescued the drowning individual. They took him to their encampment, which was at some little distance—and succeeded in resuscitating him. When he came to himself, he was seized with a paroxysm of excitement bordering upon frenzy—so that it was dangerous to let him depart by himself; and to all questions put as to who he was, and whether he came in the water by accident or in attempting self-destruction, no coherent response could be elicited.

Much as the gipsy character has been maligned, and low as it is generally held in public estimation,—I can assure you, Mary, that it is not without its noblest feelings of generosity. I must moreover inform you that the rites of hospitality are held most sacred amongst the Zingaree race; and that whenever circumstances place it in their power to render a service to a fellow-creature, their hearts prompt them to the faithful fulfilment thereof. In the gipsy encampment, therefore, was the individual who had been rescued from drowning, retained and ministered unto with all possible attention. At daybreak the people of that encampment departed in a van which they possessed, to another district; and they bore the half-frenzied stranger with them. But in the course of that day he made his escape, notwithstanding the precautions they took to the contrary, and the kindness which he experienced. Thus the gipsies remained in total ignorance of who he was, and everything that related to him. Three years afterwards—in the middle of the year 1829—as I was one evening returning to the house in St. Giles's, I perceived a poor man, wretchedly clad, sink down upon the steps of a door at a little distance from my own. I accosted him, and found that he was perishing with famine and illness. I spoke kindly to him: he answered faintly and incoherently; and methought his intellects were affected. I assisted him to walk to my house, where I gave him an asylum and provided him with medical succour. In a few days he grew somewhat better; and his mind attained a certain degree of composure. It chanced that one of the gipsies who three years back had rescued the drowning stranger from the waters of the Stour, called to see me at the house on this occasion; and he happened to behold the invalid. He at once recognized him as the individual whose life he had thus saved. The poor man, deeply sensible of the kindnesses which he was now for the second time experiencing at the hands of the gipsy race, confided to my mother and myself certain particulars of his past life; and to my astonishment I thus learnt that he was none other than your father. At that time all I knew of you was in connexion with the rescue of Lady Harlesdon's child at the *Tramper's Arms*, and the vildy treacherous part which I myself had been so unfortunately led to play towards you in Derbyshire. Yes—I knew a little more of you than that: for I had read in the newspapers of your noble conduct in respect to Leonard Percival on the occasion of the trial at Derby;—and admiring your character, I was already stricken with remorse for having become an agent of your persecutors. I was therefore rejoiced to think that accident had led me to show some little kindness towards the person whom you had been taught to regard as your father, though he at the time believed that he was *not* your parent, but that you were the offspring of an illicit amour carried on by his wife."

"Oh, the fatal error! the dreadful mystery!" I exclaimed, shuddering as I hurriedly flung a look over the past. "But proceed, Barbauld—proceed. Your narrative is fraught with the deepest interest for me."

"Your father," continued the Gipsy Queen, "told me and my mother how he had learnt the circumstance of his wife's frailty and his own dishonour—how he had immolated her paramour to

his vengeance—and how he had sought death in the stream from which he was rescued. In the three years which followed, had he been a wretched wanderer, living upon charity, and enduring the severest mental tortures. I told him that accident had rendered me acquainted with you: but I did not explain the precise circumstances—or at least, not those which would have been a revelation of my own treacherous conduct towards you. I spoke to him in terms eulogistic of your character—and he wept abundantly;—for I found that there was at the bottom of his heart a lingering sentiment of affection towards the children whom for so many years he had regarded and loved as his own. He besought and implored that if ever I again encountered you, I would preserve inviolable the secret of his existence: for he knew that in Aslsford it was believed that he was no more. Both my mother and I faithfully pledged ourselves to fulfil his request so long as circumstances might render it necessary. He said that though not altogether indifferent as to the welfare of yourself, your brothers and sisters,—yet never again could he see any of you, inasmuch as he could only look upon you as the offspring of guilt and shame—the living evidences of his dishonour—the proofs of his wife's frailty. And yet in respect to your sister Jane he experienced a somewhat different feeling. In her—and in her alone—he thought that he beheld his own distinctive features—and yet he was not sure: nor was it possible for him to reveal the secret of his existence to her without making it known to the rest of you. Thus, under all circumstances, was his resolve firmly taken to remain as one dead to those whom he had been wont to regard as his children."

"Alas, my poor father!" I murmured, the tears trickling down my cheeks.

"Great was the compassion which my mother and I experienced for the unhappy man," continued the Gipsy Queen: "and we assured him of an asylum beneath our roof so long as circumstances might compel him to need it. This his deplorable condition forced him to accept; and he became known in the house by the name of Graham. His illness continued for a long time; and I may add that both my mother and myself ministered unto him with the utmost care and attention. It was while he still continued stretched upon the bed of illness, that you accompanied me for the first time to that house. You remember that you required of me a few lines,—a sort of certificate, indeed,—to clear up your character in respect to the transactions in Derbyshire, so that you might prove your innocence the next time you communicated with Lady Harlesdon. It did not strike me that there was any indiscretion in taking you to that house; because your father was, as I fancied, chained immovably to his couch by the hand of illness; and I likewise believed that it would be impossible for him to overhear what took place between us in the adjacent room. But it would seem that he did hear your voice—he recognized it—and seized with a sudden yearning towards you, he was inspired with sufficient strength to leave his bed and burst in upon us in the way which you must remember. His intellect was disturbed at the time; and hence his appearance in a condition which doubtless struck you with the idea that he wore the winding-sheet of the dead.

I bore you away in a state of unconsciousness to the tavern where you were staying; and when, on recovering, you put such earnest questions respecting that apparition, I was compelled to have recourse to falsehoods in order to prevent you from clinging to the belief that it was your own father whom you had really seen. Thus I assured you that he belonged to our tribe, and that I had known him from childhood. Now, believe me, Mary Price, when I declare that if it would have been to your advantage to know that it was indeed your father and that he was alive,—I would have told you the truth, notwithstanding the vow I had previously pledged to him in respect to the maintenance of his secret. But of what benefit would it have been to you to encounter one who entertained the conviction that he was *not* your father, and that you were one of the living evidences of his dead wife's shame and of his own dishonour? Therefore it was as much through kind consideration on your own account, as in compliance with your sire's expressed injunction and wish, that I persisted so gravely and earnestly in the statement I made. And if you should wonder, Mary," added the Gipsy Queen, "that I could look you so steadily in the face while thus deceiving you,—and that on all subsequent occasions, when in answer to your queries I gave the same denial, my countenance should have continued equally immovable as well as straightforward in its expression,—you must remember that it is a portion of the gipsy's craft thus to be enabled to exercise the utmost power of command over the looks."

"I give you credit, Barbauld," I said, "for the very best intentions in thus keeping from me the circumstance of my father's existence. And on that second occasion——"

"I know, Mary, to what you allude," she interrupted me: "you are thinking of the incident which took place at the time of your poor brother's death? Yes: it was indeed your father whom you beheld on that occasion likewise! He was not living with us at that time: but he happened to call at the house at the very moment that your brother—his own eldest son—was breathing his last. He was profoundly affected: he bent over the corpse—he kissed the inanimate cheek—and it was with some difficulty that my mother succeeded in getting him away at the very instant that you were recovering from the swoon into which you had fallen. And now, Mary, I have no farther explanations to give: nor will I again seek to impress upon you that it was with the best possible motive I persevered in steadily denying your father's existence. But this I may add—that out of regard for you, I have succoured him to the extent of my means."

"Oh! accept my sincerest gratitude," I exclaimed, taking the hands of the Gipsy Queen and pressing them both warmly. "Not for a single moment do I feel hurt or offended at the course which you thought fit to adopt in giving me those repeated denials. But again you promise me that the moment you see my father——"

"Rest assured that he shall come to you," responded Barbauld: and after a little more conversation, we separated. She took her departure; and I returned to the room where I had left my brother and Eustace. To them I explained everything



which had just taken place between myself and the Gipsy Queen; and we sat talking upon these and other matters until nearly eleven o'clock, when they took leave of me.

On the following morning William came to breakfast; and immediately afterwards we repaired to Furnival's Inn to see Mr. Crosby, the late Sir Aubrey Clavering's solicitor. He at once recognized me: for the reader will recollect that I had seen this gentleman before, in respect to the jewels for the recovery of which Sir Aubrey Clavering had offered a reward, and concerning which I was enabled to give such intelligence that led to their restoration. Mr. Crosby received me and William with the utmost civility and respect; for, as he had drawn up Sir Aubrey's will, he of course knew the position in which it had placed me. I produced the document: he at once said that it was all correct; and we proceeded to Doctors' Commons to take out the probate. This, and other

business connected with my inheritance, occupied some hours: for I likewise instructed Mr. Crosby to take the requisite steps to procure the Royal sanction for the addition of the name of Clavering to mine own. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when William and I returned to the lodgings in Conduit Street. Eustace was there waiting for us; and his countenance was radiant with joy. I at once comprehended the cause: he had been successful with his brother Lord Wilberton. And such proved to be the case.

"Ferdinand," said Eustace, "is now marvellously changed in his demeanour towards me, and in the way, my dear Mary, in which he speaks of you. As if the accession of wealth could enhance one tittle those previous claims to consideration and respect which your virtues constituted! However, such is the way of the world; and my brother seems to think that Miss Price Clavering with a large estate and fine fortune, is a very different

being from plain Miss Price, the excellence of whose character so recently constituted her only wealth. He has not merely expressed his readiness to place me in immediate possession of my own fortune: but he begs and beseeches that the past may be forgotten, and that you will permit him to call and pay his respects to you as his future sister-in-law. I did not take it upon myself to give any answer: it remains, my dear Mary, with you."

"And what other answer can I give, dear Eustace," I replied, "save and except that if you have overlooked and forgotten your brother's unkindness, it is not for me to cherish rancour or ill-will on that account?"

"Nothing less, sweetest girl," responded Eustace, with joy upon his countenance, "did I expect from your generosity. Always consistent in this magnanimity of soul, you are the most adorable of your sex!"—and as he thus spoke with fervid enthusiasm, he embraced me affectionately.

It must be observed that Lord Wilberton,—who was now as zealous to make amends for the past as he had so recently proved himself uncompromising and implacable,—purposed to transfer from his own funds the entire amount of his brother's fortune,—the actual investment itself not being really available for this purpose, under the provisions of the late General Sir Thomas Wilberton's will, until the day of Eustace's marriage. I was rejoiced that this last interview with his brother had terminated in so satisfactory a manner to himself,—not merely because it was distressing to know of two such near relatives being at enmity,—but likewise because Captain Quentin was thus placed in a position of affluence, and he need no longer reflect with a certain scrupulous delicacy of feeling on the disparity between his own worldly position and mine. As a matter of course he did not intend to retain any longer the Government situation which had been procured for him, and which he had thus only held for about a fortnight.

In the forenoon of the following day he accompanied his brother into the City, where the promised transfer took place; and Eustace was thus put in possession of his fortune. On their way back again from where this business had been transacted, they stopped in Conduit Street. Lord Wilberton's splendid equipage dashed up to the door of the house where I dwelt; and as it had previously been understood between me and Eustace that this interview should take place on the present occasion, I was prepared to receive his lordship. On being introduced to my drawing-room, in company with his brother, he advanced towards me—proffered his hand—and said in a tone of marked respect, "Miss Clavering, permit me to greet you as my future sister-in-law, and I sincerely hope that whatsoever little unpleasant things have belonged to the past may be forgotten."

I gave a suitable reply; and Lord Wilberton sat down. I could not help thinking that it was but a little time back—only a few weeks indeed—that when I called upon him at Wilberton House, I was kept standing the whole time of our interview, and was treated with all the marked coldness and hauteur which aristocratic insensibility is wont to show to an inferior. But now how different was it! Lord Wilberton was *my* visitor, paying me the most respectful attention—studying to deport himself

towards me in the most conciliatory manner—and treating me as if I had never been otherwise in social position than what I now was. It is a strange world in which the want or the possession of riches creates such a vast difference, although the character, disposition, and personal appearance of the individual may continue precisely the same! Lord Wilberton conversed upon a variety of topics—skimming lightly over the fashionable occurrences of the day—and doing his best to make the hour which he thus passed, together with his brother, at my lodgings, glide away pleasantly and without awkwardness or embarrassment to any one. Eustace was to dine with him that day; and therefore I had arranged to accompany William on a visit to Mrs. Summerly. There I found Mr. Crawford and Sybilla, who had come up from Essex in the morning, and had intended to call upon me. My brother and myself accordingly passed a very pleasant afternoon and evening in the company of those valued friends. Mr. Appleton, having learnt from William that I was to be there, likewise called in the course of that evening; and nothing could exceed the warmth with which the worthy old gentleman congratulated me on my heritage of a fortune.

On the following day the Earl and Countess of Chilstone, Lord Egerton, and my sister Jane, came to London from Buckinghamshire, and took up their quarters at his lordship's town mansion in Grosvenor Square, which for some months past had been undergoing a thorough reparation, and was now finished. I and William passed a day with them: they likewise invited Lord Wilberton and Captain Quentin to dinner in the evening. I was much pleased to find that Lord Egerton addressed me without the slightest embarrassment or restraint, as if he had entirely succeeded in subduing those feelings with which my presence was wont to inspire him; and I was also rejoiced to observe that he and Eustace appeared to take a liking for each other the very moment they met, and by their mutual deportment showed a resolve to cultivate each other's friendship. I sought an opportunity of speaking alone with Jane, and broke to her the circumstance that our father was alive,—but entering as little as possible into particulars relative to the dishonouring suspicions which had affixed themselves in his imagination to our deceased mother's name. Jane was not one to ask many questions: her natural good sense showed her that there were some things which I thought it would be prudent to keep back from her knowledge; and she was contented with as much as I chose to reveal to her. She was profoundly affected, as well as astonished and also rejoiced, to learn that our father was still alive; and I promised that she should see him the moment circumstances would permit.

The Countess of Chilstone pressed me to take up my abode at the mansion during my residence in London: but I gratefully though firmly declined the invitation,—thinking it better for Lord Egerton's sake, as well as more consistent with propriety, not to be too much in his company. For knowing how sincere had been his affection for me, I dreaded lest that calmness of mind to which his feelings had become tempered down, should be disturbed by a revival of his former passion. The Countess,—comprehending my scruples, and fully appreciating them,—assured me, notwithstanding, that she felt

convinced her son had learnt, or had rather tutored himself to regard me only in the light of a friend: but when I still persevered in my former resolution, she suffered me to have my own way.

CHAPTER CLXI.

THE LAST SCENE OF A CAREER OF ERROR.

I MUST not forget to mention that one of the first uses Captain Quentin made of his fortune, was to repay the ten thousand pounds Mr. Crawford had so generously lent him, and for whose kindness the utmost gratitude was expressed. Eustace took an opportunity of telling my brother that he should not think of offering to refund to me the sum of money I had expended in procuring his liberation; as he knew very well that I should only feel hurt and vexed if he made such a proposal. He added that it would be moreover too formally and ridiculously punctilious; inasmuch as at the expiration of ten or eleven months, all that he and I now severally possessed would be rendered joint and mutual property by the circumstance of marriage. William expressed his assent to Captain Quentin's reasoning, and told him that he should hint to me what had taken place.

I must next observe that the sudden accession of wealth developed to my knowledge some new phases in the world's folly, especially with regard to the fawning sycophancy and wretched servility which in many quarters are shown towards those on whom riches are showered. For instance, paragraphs appeared in the newspapers to the effect that "Sir Aubrey Clavering, the last male scion of a long race of Baronets, and belonging to one of the oldest families in Kent, had died, leaving his estate to his cousin Miss Price Clavering." One paragraph went on to declare that "this young lady, though always occupying a respectable position in society, was comparatively in different circumstances before she received this inheritance. It was by her mother's side, we believe," continued the journalist, "that she was thus related to the Clavering family: her father was a large builder and contractor, well known and much respected in Ashford, where he resided for a number of years." Thus was I represented to be the *cousin* of the late Sir Aubrey Clavering: and thus was my poor father—a humble journeyman carpenter—converted into a large builder and contractor! Another journalist-scribe laboured hard to create for me a splendid lineage. "Miss Price Clavering," he said, "belongs to an ancient and time-honoured family. We believe that her ancestry can be distinctly traced back to the celebrated Rupert de Pries, a Norman baron who accompanied William the First in the invasion of this country. The name of Pries became corrupted into that of Price: but the lineal line can be followed with unbroken accuracy, down to the young lady who has now superadded the name of Clavering to her own." I can assure this journalist that I did not at all thank him for representing me as being thus descended from any of the French robbers who accompanied William of Normandy on his buccaneering expedition (which the mere circumstance of success has dignified in history with the higher

name of "invasion"): nor in the course of my reading had I ever before encountered any celebrated individual, of that time, bearing the name of De Pries. I therefore set the whole rhodomontade down as a coinage of the precious scribe's fertile imagination: but if he thought that he was ministering to my vanity and pandering to my pride by such rubbish, I now take leave to assure him that I read it with ineffable disgust. Many paragraphs of the same kind went the round of the newspapers; and I believe that a more bitter satire—though perfectly unintentional on the part of the writers—could not possibly be penned upon the ridiculous pride of family and of lineage which prevails amongst the higher orders in this country, than those wretched mawkish drivellings to which I have alluded.

I now pass on to a subject of more importance. Three weeks had passed since my return to London; and I had received no answers to the advertisements inserted in the newspapers, and severally addressed to my father and Sarah. Nor had Barbauld Azetha as yet seen him whom I myself was so anxious to meet again. One evening, at the expiration of that fortnight,—between nine and ten o'clock,—I was sitting alone in my drawing-room at Mrs. Chaplin's, when Eliza (Mr. Tufnell's niece, who was in my service as lady's-maid) entered to inform me that a woman desired to speak to me immediately. Thinking it might be an emissary from the Gipsy Queen, I ordered her to be shown up; and Eliza accordingly proceeded to introduce her. But the moment she entered the room, a glance showed me that she was not of the gipsy race. She was an elderly person—meanly clad—with hard features—and a general repulsiveness of look that spoke nothing in her favour.

"I want you to come with me directly," she said, "and see a young woman who's at my house and very ill."

"Sarah!"—that name instantaneously burst from my lips as I started up with galvanic quickness from my chair.

"Yes—that's the name," said the woman. "She told me to mention it; and you would know directly who it was. She also said you had advertised for her—but it was only to-day she knew that this was the case."

"But tell me," I exclaimed, with hysterical anxiety, "is she very ill? what is the matter with her?"

"Fever, and cold, and what not," answered the woman, in a callous and indifferent manner. "It's a general break up of the constitution, the doctor says."

"I will go with you at once!" was my next ejaculation: and I rang the bell violently. "Is it far hence? have you come on foot? have you a vehicle waiting?"

"Lord, no—not I, Miss!" responded the woman, looking surprised at the question, "I don't ride in coaches; and as for the distance, it's a matter of two mile or so—up in Camden Town."

"Eliza," I said to the maid, who at this moment entered the room, "quick—my bonnet and shawl—and hasten to tell Mrs. Chaplin to have a coach fetched at once. Or stay!—go quick to Mrs. Chaplin—I will run up-stairs and put on my things."

"Dear me, Miss Clavering!" said poor Eliza,

seized with apprehension: "is anything the matter?"

"No—nothing, nothing," I answered, scarcely knowing what I did say, and meaning the reply to reassure the frightened girl. She hurried from the room: and I sped up-stairs to put on a bonnet and shawl. As I was descending, Mrs. Chaplin met me; and catching me by the arm, she said in a low but hurried whisper, "For heaven's sake, my dear Miss Clavering, what is the matter? Remember your adventure at Ashford—beware of treachery!"

"No, no—there can be no treachery here," I said, painfully excited. "It is my sister—my poor sister Sarah."

"Shall I come with you?" asked the good woman.

"No," I responded: "but accept my thanks! She is ill—I am fearful she is dying—and I must see her alone. Do not think me unkind—"

But I stopped short,—tears choking my utterance, and my heart being torn with convulsive sobs.

"At least, my dear Miss Clavering," urged Mrs. Chaplin, "do tell me where you are going: for my mind is full of apprehensions—and if you do not come back soon, I must know where to come and search for you."

"I know not: but we will inquire," I said, in order to tranquillize Mrs. Chaplin's fears: for I myself entertained none. I had the deep and agonizing conviction that it was all, alas! too true. We went into the drawing-room where I had left the woman; and on questioning her, she at once gave the address of the house in Camden Town, and of which she represented herself to be the mistress,—adding that she let the chief portion out in lodgings—and that Miss Smith (the name by which Sarah appeared to be passing at the place) occupied one of the rooms. By the time these particulars were elicited, the hackney-coach which had been sent for arrived; and I entered in company with the woman. The vehicle drove away; and I renewed my questions, which were put with the feverish haste of mingled anxiety and affliction. I learnt that Miss Smith had taken the lodging about a fortnight back—that she had a very severe cold on her when she arrived—that it had rapidly got worse—that sympathetic fever had supervened—and that the surgeon who attended her, did not seem to give much hope. The woman of her own accord informed me that Miss Smith seemed very poor, and that the small amount of funds she had with her at first were now exhausted—that she came without luggage of any sort, and was altogether in a sad position. Oh! how scalding were the tears which rained down my cheeks as I listened to these things. Good heavens! to what was my unhappy sister reduced—and how had her fall been so sudden? It was only two months since I had seen her in May Fair, and since she had departed with one of the dissipated revellers whom I had on that occasion found in her company. Poor girl! her errors were well-nigh forgotten—or if remembered, only to be commiserated; and I felt that she was as dear to me as if she had never deviated from the paths of virtue.

The coach at length stopped in a narrow and gloomy street, where most of the houses were of poor appearance. We alighted: the woman opened the door with a latch-key, and conducted me up to a back room on the second floor. I entered: and

though it was a somewhat cold evening, at the close of the month of September, yet the fever-heat of the little chamber into which I passed, was almost stifling. A candle burnt dimly on the table, but sufficiently clear to show at a glance the meagre—I might indeed say miserable furniture, and the general wretchedness of the place. And there—stretched in a bed without curtains, which heaven knows however were not necessary, so hot was the room—lay my poor sister! Her long dark hair was scattered dishevelled over the bolster—for pillow there was none: her eyes burnt unnaturally bright—and the hectic fever-marks were upon her cheeks: but all the rest of her countenance was wan, pale, and haggard. The conviction struck to me at the moment that the landlady's account of her illness, so far from being exaggerated, was if anything under-rated: the finger of death was already touching her—its trace was upon her lineaments—her hours were numbered!

As I entered the room with nervous haste, and yet with softness of tread, Sarah gazed up at me with those unnaturally burning eyes: and for a moment she outwardly expressed no emotion. But as I approached the bed, she suddenly burst forth into a paroxysm of agonizing sobs; and turning round, buried her face in the bolster. I rushed towards her,—I took her head in my arms,—pressing it to my bosom, and murmuring a few broken and scarcely articulate words. Then my voice was choked with the violence of my feelings; and I hung over her in speechless anguish.

"Mary—dearest Mary," said the unhappy girl, turning abruptly round again, and flinging her arms about my neck, "this is kind of you indeed!—Oh, too kind,—for I do not deserve it!"

"Speak not thus, dearest, dearest sister," I said. "Oh! why did you not send for me before?"

"I knew not that you were still in London—or rather," she went on to say, more slowly, "I did not like to send for you. I was ashamed to see your face—you so good, so pure, so virtuous—I a loathly, lost, polluted creature!"

"Sarah, Sarah!" I said, in scarcely audible accents, "if you are truly repentant, you need not speak of yourself thus."

"Repentant!" she echoed, almost wildly: "would to heaven that I could recall the past!—Oh, would to heaven that I could! To live the last few years of my life over again.—But no—that is impossible—and I must go hence—I feel that I have but a short time to live! It was by the merest accident," she continued, her voice growing fainter, and her utterance more feeble with the exertion she had already made to speak, and the excitement of her feelings,—“it was by mere accident that I saw your advertisement. I was lying here alone—the surgeon had just left me—and that newspaper,”—she pointed towards one as she thus spoke,—“which had wrapped up something that was brought to me a day or two since, lay upon this chair by the bedside. Oh, I could not endure my own thoughts!—I stretched forth my hand—I took it, to read anything that might divert my memory from a too faithful clinging to the past. The very first thing that met my eyes, was that advertisement. Though so vaguely worded, I comprehended it in a moment; and I read it over and over again, until a film came upon my eyes, and I could read nothing more. And

then I wept as I thought of you, dear Mary—Oh, I wept!”

The unhappy creature suddenly ceased speaking: but her tears gushed out afresh, and her sobs convulsed her anew. I lavished upon her the most endearing caresses—I said all I could to administer consolation to her soul: but, alas! I had no hope of life to hold out—for death had already marked the victim as his own. But she was comforted by what I said; and her affliction experiencing mitigation, she murmuringly whispered in my ear, “It is better that I should die, Mary, after having thus disgraced myself! Wherefore should I wish to live?”

Then she joined her hands and remained silent for a few minutes: but her lips moved slightly—and by her look I could tell she was praying inwardly. And I too prayed, with the most heartfelt devotion, for the future welfare of one who was soon to pass into another sphere; and the bitterness of affliction was soothed and moderated both on her side and on mine.

“I have done with all worldly concerns, Mary,” she presently said; “and therefore it is scarcely needful to ask the meaning of that advertisement. Yet you may tell me its object.”

“Since you wish it, Sarah, you shall know,” I answered. “By an accident, the particulars of which I will not pause to explain——” and then I stopped suddenly short; for it struck me that I was wrong to say anything that might tend powerfully and painfully to recall her thoughts to the vain things of this earth.

“Do not tell me then, dear Mary,” she said, with so sweet a look of resignation that I could hardly believe it appeared upon the countenance of one who was wont to be so headstrong and impetuous. “I do not seek to know it, unless you think fit to tell me. But fear not that if the intelligence be good, it will disturb the sanctity of my thoughts during the few remaining hours of my life. No: that is impossible! I have bidden farewell to everything belonging to the great world without. I know that I must die—that even while I am yet speaking, my existence ebbs away—and my mind is bent upon futurity.”

“It is sweet indeed to hear you speak thus, Sarah,” I answered, tears again trickling down my cheeks—but tears evoked by other feelings than those of bitterest anguish which had ere now poured forth their crystal flood. “What can I do for you, my dearest sister? Let me send for your medical attendant—let me inquire if he will permit you to be transported to my abode——”

“No, dearest Mary—it is useless,” answered Sarah, taking my hand and pressing it to her lips. “To move me, would only be to accelerate the final moment. Let me lie here, on this mean couch to which my own wickedness has brought me down; and if you will but remain with me—it cannot be long, Mary, that you will have to stay——”

“Sarah—dear Sarah—not for a moment will I leave you!”—and as I thus spoke, I took off my bonnet and shawl. “But let me send for the doctor at once.”

“He will come presently,” observed Sarah: “it must be near eleven o’clock—and he told me that he would visit me the last thing. Ah! my dear Mary, when I read that advertisement in the morning, I decided upon sending for you—but—but I had no ready and willing messenger to come to you—

the woman of the house knew that my purse was empty—and she would not put herself out of the way on my account: so that I even feared I might be left to die without seeing you.”

“Oh, my poor sister!” I murmured, bending over and kissing her hot feverish cheek: “would to heaven that you had sent for me at first!”

“Have I not already told you, Mary, that I was ashamed? Oh, you know not what I have suffered for these two months past! I have been terribly punished! Shudderingly do I look back to that day—Oh! and how regretfully!—it is but two short months back—when you besought and implored me to turn from the path of error, and you would receive me with open arms. But I had not the courage nor the power to endeavour to be good: I accepted the protection of one of those whom you saw with me—but it was only for two days that we were together. He read in the newspapers of the arrest of him whom you saw ignominiously borne away in custody—he conceived that I must have been an accomplice in that man’s frauds and villainies—he took a loathing for me and left me abruptly. We were then fifty miles from London. I remained for three weeks at the lodging where he had deserted me; and being penniless, all my apparel was detained for the rent. I was then thrust forth upon the wide world! During those three weeks my jewellery had been parted with—I had nothing left wherewith to raise even the means of bringing me to London. I walked the whole distance——”

“Good heavens, my poor sister!” I murmured, my heart again torn with ineffable anguish.

“Yes—two whole days did I thus drag myself along: and on reaching the metropolis,” continued Sarah, “I called upon a nobleman whom I had known when I was in better circumstances. From that individual I obtained a few pounds; and I took a lodging at the West End. Alas! Mary, the confession on which I have entered compels me to admit that I hoped to find another protector: but I failed—I will not dwell upon this portion of my narrative: suffice it to say that finding my funds were slipping away, and that illness was already coming fast upon me, I thought to take a cheaper lodging and nurse myself to get well. Accident led me hither: but instead of my health mending, it rapidly broke down and—and—I must die!”

She ceased, and covering her face with her hands, remained silent for some minutes. Methought that she prayed again; and therefore I did not break in upon her devotions.

“You can tell me now, if you will, Mary,” she said after a long pause, “wherefore you so much wished to see me. It is the passing whim of curiosity that I thus ask you to gratify.”

“I will tell you, Sarah,” was my response, “for this reason principally—that you may learn the good intentions of one who, with all her eccentricities, meant to be a kind friend to you: for it is not well that generous deeds should be kept secret from those who are the objects of them.”

“I already comprehend you, Mary,” answered Sarah. “The late Mrs. Whitfield’s will——”

“Yes, dear sister—your conjecture is accurate. It was discovered. Yourself and Jane were left her heiresses——”

"Dear Jane!" murmured Sarah: "would that I could see her! And William too—my dear brother William—would that I could see him also! But I shall never behold them more."

"Yes, my beloved sister," I said, "you shall see them both! They are in London—they shall be fetched—I will send at once. Oh! it was wrong in me not to think of this before!"

"No, no, Mary!" exclaimed Sarah, a visible shudder passing over her entire form and making the very bed tremble beneath her—while an expression of indescribable anguish swept across her features: "on second thoughts it must not be so. It was sufficiently painful for me to encounter *you*, who have seen me so frequently since my career of error began: but I could not endure to look those in the face whom I have not met since my fall from the path of virtue. No, I repeat—it must not be. I could not encounter the gaze of my pure-hearted sister Jane. But you will tell them both, Mary, that from my death-bed—No, I dare not say that I send them my blessing! Such a word from my lips would be a mockery—But this you can tell them, that I entreat their forgiveness for any pain I may have caused them, and for the dishonour I have brought upon our name."

At this moment the landlady of the house opened the chamber-door; and looking in, beckoned me out to speak to her.

"One moment, dear Sarah," I said, and went forth upon the landing, closing the door gently behind me: for I saw by the woman's look that she wished to speak to me alone and unheard by my dying sister.

"The landlady of your house, Miss," she said, "is here, and she wishes to see you immediately. She is below. She told me that I was merely to fetch you out of the room, and not say anything to excite you in the presence of the invalid, for fear it should excite her also."

I was indeed surprised that Mrs. Chaplin should have come so soon after me, and that she should thus have me fetched away from the presence of my dying sister: I therefore knew that something of importance had occurred to induce her to act in this manner. I hastened to accompany the woman of the house down the stairs; and she showed me into her own room, where I found Mrs. Chaplin, and with whom I was left alone.

"First, Miss Clavering," said the kind-hearted woman, "tell me how is your sister? Is she so bad as the mistress of the house represents her?"

"She is worse—she is worse," I cried, the tears starting forth: "she is dying! But what has brought you hither?"

"Now don't excite yourself, my dear young friend," answered Mrs. Chaplin; "and forgive me for being so familiar—but you know what an interest I take in you—and don't excite yourself, I say—it is no harm—it is something you have been wishing for—there is a person waiting outside—he came soon after you left—he accompanied me hither—but I would not let him enter till I had first prepared you—"

"Oh, I understand! I understand!" I exclaimed, trembling all over: "it is my father!"

"Yes," responded Mrs. Chaplin; "and he yearns to fold you to his heart. I told him whither you had come, and why—and he insisted on speeding

after you, that he too may kneel at the death-bed of your poor Sarah."

"Go and fetch him—go and fetch my father!"—and I was so overpowered by my emotions, that I sank down all trembling upon a seat.

Mrs. Chaplin issued forth. Not more than two minutes elapsed ere I heard the front door, which she had left ajar, open again; and yet those two minutes were a perfect age of wild and ineffable emotions. Then my father rushed into the room. With a cry that I could not repress, I sprang forward, and was clasped in his arms.

"Mary—my own dear, dear girl—my sweet child!" he murmured, sobbing with his highly-wrought feelings: "we meet once more—how I love you, my dearest Mary!"

That embrace was not merely prolonged—it was renewed over and over again; and my father continued to give utterance to the most endearing expressions. At length our feelings grew calmer; and he said, "Alas, dear Mary, the joy of this meeting is cruelly, cruelly impaired by the terrible tidings I have heard. Our poor Sarah—But go you and prepare her to receive me. Keep me not long away from her! I shall wait here till you come back."

Again we embraced; and I issued forth from the room. Mrs. Chaplin was in the passage: from a considerate delicacy she had left me and my father alone together at this meeting.

"Does he know," I said to her in a whisper, "that Sarah has strayed from the path of virtue?"

"Yes—your father knows it," responded Mrs. Chaplin,—"but never until this day. It appears that the Gipsy Queen thought it needful, amongst other explanations, to make that avowal, in order to spare you the pain of being the first to break it to your sire."

"Go to him," I said,—"comfort him—remain with him during the few minutes that must elapse before he can come up. I will not leave Sarah again. These hurrys to and fro may excite her. In about ten minutes let my father come up."

Mrs. Chaplin entered the room to do my bidding; and I ascended to the chamber where my poor sister lay. She gazed up at me in painful suspense: for she fancied that something had happened, and the morbid state of her feelings made her suspect that it was of an unpleasant nature. I sat down by the side of the bed; and beginning by relieving her from any apprehension of that kind, I gradually and cautiously broke to her the intelligence that our father lived—that he was in London—that he wished to see her—that he was at no great distance—and, finally, that he was in the house. Nevertheless, despite the graduated progress of these unfoldings, Sarah was seized with a wild excitement of mingled joy to hear that our father lived, and of poignant shame to look him in the face. I exerted myself to soothe and console her; and I succeeded by the time that I heard footsteps ascending the stairs. The door opened—and our father entered. Then followed a scene which I have not the power to describe. He threw himself upon his knees by the side of his daughter's death-bed—his arms round her neck—his caresses mingling with his tears and his convulsive sobs. And Sarah too wept and sobbed as if the speedy breaking of her heart would even anticipate the otherwise near approach of death;

and the most passionate self-upbraidings came from the lips of both. My father accused himself of being the cause of his daughter's fall, inasmuch as he had deserted his children—he had left them to themselves upon the wide world—he had for years past ceased to provide for their welfare. And on the other hand, Sarah accused herself of being unworthy her father's notice—undeserving of his caresses. It was the saddest and the most affecting scene I ever beheld in the whole course of my life—a scene every detail of which rises up vividly before me as I pen these words. And I too—Oh! I was overwhelmed with grief; and had it not been for the entreaties, broken though they were, which I interjected amidst that double outpouring and commingling tide of ineffable anguish, it would have been prolonged to even a far greater extent. But at length I succeeded in pouring the balm of comfort and consolation into the souls of those two distressed and self-accusing beings; and my father, rising from his knees, sat down on the chair by the bed-side.

The medical man was now introduced to the room; and I at once saw kindness and benevolence expressed in his looks. That he was a person of this disposition had already been apparent, from the attention he had shown my poor sister, even while suspecting that he would never be remunerated for his services and his medicines. With intense anxiety did I study his countenance as he felt the pulse and contemplated the features of my perishing sister. Our father too kept his eyes fixed upon the medical man; but we both alike saw—and Sarah herself perceived also—from the expression that deepened upon his face, that there was not the slightest hope. This was but confirming the sad impression already made upon my father and myself: and yet despite our very convictions, we were held in suspense until there was no longer the faintest pretext for doubt.

"I can do nothing more," whispered the surgeon apart to my father and me: "it is useless even to ask the poor creature to take another drop of medicine. I will go and remain below—until——"

But as he stopped short, I said, as an ice-chill swept shudderingly through my entire form—and it was in a low faint voice that I spoke—"Is it then so near?"

The surgeon gave no verbal reply: but his look was eloquent with a fatal answer. Noiselessly he quitted the room—the door closed behind him—my father and myself were once more alone with the dying and repentant Sarah. We both wept as one after the other we bent over her and pressed our lips to the countenance upon which the twilight shade of death, cold and gray, was already stealing. Then we simultaneously sank upon our knees; and in silence we prayed—Sarah praying also—and no sound nor circumstance to interrupt this communion of the two spirits which were to remain, with the third that was about to take its departure.

Presently Sarah broke that silence. It was in a low faint voice that she spoke; and there was an ineffable sweetness in her language, in her tones, and her looks. All the natural impetuosity and self-will of her disposition were not merely attempted down, but likewise subdued into a holy resignation and a perfect penitence in these last mysterious moments of dissolving nature. The fire that

within the hour which was passing, had burnt so brightly, was dying out of her eyes: the hectic fever-marks were fading from her cheeks; and she was evidently sinking away from life.

"Do not weep for me, dearest father," she said, in those soft plaintive tones to which her voice was modulated down: "nor you, beloved Mary, weep for one who ought not to cling to that earthly existence of which she has made so bad a use, and who is going into another world where there is mercy for the truly repentant. No—do not weep for me! It is better that I should die thus young after all that has happened, than live on for years to feel my heart corroding with remorse. Father," she continued, after a brief pause, and now speaking with more difficulty, "if you are about to lose one daughter, you will have two left who will be your pride and comfort; if you are about to close the eyes of one of your children, you will have three remaining to prove worthy of your love. Oh, do not weep thus, dearest father! do not weep thus, my own sweet sister Mary!—No—do not weep!"

These were the last words that came from Sarah's lips; and a few minutes afterwards life was extinct. But the vital spirit stole so gently out of her form, and its departure was so perfectly unaccompanied by any painful spasm or convulsing throes, that it was difficult to fix the precise moment when the eternal soul and the mortal clay were thus separated. Besides, both my father and myself were blinded by the tears which poured from our eyes, though for Sarah's sake we so far repressed our sobs as to prevent them from having audible vent. Thus all was over—and my sister lay white and motionless, steeped in the slumber that knows no waking. I cannot describe the anguish experienced by my father and myself when the terrible conviction smote us that however passionate the outpourings of our affliction, they could not now disturb the one for whose loss we were thus so bitterly lamenting. For an hour did we remain in the chamber of death after all was over—unable to tear ourselves away,—sometimes kneeling and praying by the side of the bed—then striving to minister consolations to each other, and giving vent to fresh floods of tears because we found how ineffectual were those endeavours to impart reciprocal solace. At length a door opened gently and slowly: the medical man and Mrs. Chaplin entered; and perceiving that Sarah was no more, they besought us both to leave the scene of death. Then my father, recovering his self-possession, took me by the hand and led me forth—or rather supported me, for I was scarcely able to move of my own accord. But when the street-door of the house was reached, and my father was about to assist me into the hackney-coach which had been waiting all this time, I exclaimed in a half-frenzied state that I would not leave the remains of my deceased sister until I had seen them placed in their coffin. Mrs. Chaplin, with the kindest consideration, volunteered to tarry at that house and superintend the last sad rites previous to the funeral; and my father urged me to soothe and satisfy myself with this arrangement.

I scarcely remember what passed between my father and me as we proceeded together in the coach to Conduit Street: but well assured I am that he did his best to moderate the violence of my

affliction. This however I do remember—that when we reached the house, and I besought him to enter and take up his abode with me, he said that it were better not, for reasons that he would explain on the morrow; and assuring me that he would be with me at an early hour, he hurriedly took his departure. I ascended to my chamber; and summoning all my fortitude to my aid, I endeavoured to encounter the loss of my sister with as much resignation as she herself had displayed in the last moments of her existence.

CHAPTER CLXII.

MY FATHER.

At ten o'clock in the morning, my father made his appearance. He was clad in a suit of complete mourning—for the means to purchase which, ready made, he was indebted, as I presently learnt, to the kindness of the Gipsy Queen. I bitterly deplored my negligence and oversight in not having placed my purse at his disposal ere we parted in the middle of the night: but I was too much overwhelmed with grief at the time to give the matter a thought. My father, as he affectionately embraced me, bade me not distress myself on that account; and we sat down together to speak of the past and the present. We had indeed so many things to say: but we conversed in a low and solemn tone—for the impression of the death-bed scene still sat heavy on our souls, and it appeared as if we were in the atmosphere of death itself, and that the lost one lay in the next room, though in reality there was an interval of two miles between us and the house where she had died.

I gave into my father's hands all the papers and documents which were contained in the packet marked *Number One*, and which constituted the history of his deceased wife—my unfortunate mother. I recited in fullest detail everything which I had heard from the lips of Sir Aubrey Clavering, and which, though in a more condensed shape, the Gipsy Queen had already related to my sire. He listened with the most mournful interest; and frequently was I compelled to stop short as he burst into a paroxysm of grief which re-awoke all my own.

"Your mother was an angel, Mary!" he said, when at length I had concluded; "and till the moment of my death shall I carry about with me the remorse of a troubled spirit for the fatal suspicion I entertained concerning her. Fatal!—O heavens, it was cruel—it was merciless—it was diabolical! What atonement can I make? None, none!"—and here he became so convulsed with anguish, that it was with difficulty I could minister the slightest consolation.

I represented to him that fearfully unfortunate as the circumstances were, he need not blame himself thus; for that he only yielded to an amount of evidence which appeared crushing at the moment.

"But I am a murderer, Mary!" he exclaimed wildly, as he clasped his hands in a renewed paroxysm of convulsing violence: "I am a two-fold murderer! I murdered my poor wife—I murdered Sir Wyndham Clavering!"

"No, father," I said; "you murdered not my

poor mother. It was the shock that killed her when she found that you had read the letter. Oh! heaven knows how bitterly, bitterly I deplore her loss:—nevertheless I must not hear these self-accusings from your lips. You are unjust to yourself. As for that *other* circumstance," I added, in a lower and more solemn tone, "you thought that you were wreaking a justifiable vengeance—it was terrible—but the most righteous of men might under such circumstances have done the same."

"Yes, yes; for I was frenzied—I was maddened at the time!" exclaimed my unhappy father. "I was not the master of my actions—I was not responsible for them! O Mary, what have I suffered for more than eight years past! But upon that I will not now dwell."

After a little while he grew calmer, and in the course of the conversation which followed, he spoke of our recent meeting at Ashford.

"You may suppose, Mary," he said, "how immense was my love for my poor wife, when even still labouring under the awful impression that she had dishonoured me, I could not resist the sudden and mysterious impulse which, after the lapse of years, led me to visit her grave. But there was something providential in all that. Yes—it was not by mere accident that I encountered you there at the same time: it was heaven that directed the coincidence, in order to make me its instrument in saving you a few hours afterwards from the hands of those villains who would have taken your life. Oh, my dear Mary! my heart yearned towards you when I met you by the side of your mother's grave. For a moment I was about to clasp you in my arms. But no! the recollection struck to me of all that had passed—the fatal belief that you were not my own daughter came back to my mind—and I sped away. But that same irresistible impulse which had brought me to my dead wife's grave, led me to linger in the town, and haunt your footsteps. It was dangerous—or at least I thought so at the time: for I knew not to what extent suspicion might have attached itself to me in respect to the death of Sir Wyndham Clavering. On the other hand I knew it was believed in Ashford that I myself was no more—that I had perished as a suicide at the time—and likewise I was so much altered by care and sorrow, by wanderings and sufferings, and by frequent intervals of illness, that even if seen, I felt tolerably sure I could not be recognized. So I hung upon your footsteps; and from a distance I beheld you seek the *Saracen's Head*. I longed to present myself to you and to embrace you: for from the Gipsy Queen I had continuously heard many things proving the excellence of your character and the generosity of your soul. But still I hold back, feeling that if once I yielded to what I deemed a weakness, the resolve I had taken never to see any of you again, would be at once annihilated. Yet did I linger for some hours in Ashford. And fortunate was it that I did so: for in the evening I saw you come forth from the hotel. Stealthily I followed you at a distance: I saw you turn into the passage by the shut-up house. It was a circumstance I could not understand: there was something mysterious in the proceeding which filled me with a strange and irresistible curiosity. After some hesitation I followed. Whither could you have gone? By accident, in my bewilderment, I tried the gate



leading into the back premises of that unoccupied house. It opened—and I entered. A light penetrated between the chinks of the shutter: I approached and listened. Then, to my horror, I heard enough to prove, that you had been inveigled into a frightful snare: I rushed in and saved you.”

“Yes, dearest father,” I answered, embracing him, “to you I am indebted for my life.”

“And now, Mary,” he resumed, “I must speak to you of my future intentions. Presently we will proceed together to gaze again upon the countenance of her whom we have lost, and to imprint a kiss upon those clay-cold cheeks. I shall remain in London until after the funeral. In the interval I shall see my dear William and my sweet Jane. It would likewise afford me pleasure to be introduced to that noble-hearted young man who is to become your husband, and of whom Barbauld Azetha has spoken to me in the highest terms.

But a week hence shall I leave England—and for ever!”

“For ever?” was the echo that thrilled from my lips. “No, dearest father! Where my home is, there will your’s henceforth be also; and in my intended husband will you find a dutiful and affectionate son-in-law.”

“No, Mary,” he answered solemnly: “my resolve is taken. To you, dear girl, shall I be indebted for the trifle requisite for my support: but in some seclusion in a foreign clime shall I pass the remainder of my days. Do not attempt to dissuade me from this. Two of the children have I lost—the position of the three survivors is happily assured: and I thank heaven with grateful fervour for having showered such bounties on your heads. I have hence no care for your future welfare. And I am proud of you too—yes, I am unfeignedly proud of you, dearest Mary—and of William—and of Jane:

for it is as much to your virtues, as to fortuitous circumstances, that you have risen from the humblest walks of life, to take your places amongst the highest in the land. But still, I repeat, my resolve is fixed. I have suffered so much in this country, that I can endure its very atmosphere no longer. Moreover, Mary," continued my father, with a look of profound sadness, "if I remain in England, I should feel it to be my duty, after all I have learnt within the last twenty-four hours, to surrender myself up to justice as the author of Sir Wyndham Clavering's death. In that case, Mary, if I stood face to face with a judge and jury of my countrymen, I should have to tell all, in order to save myself from being branded as a deliberate and blood-thirsty assassin, and from being doomed to an ignominious death. But those revelations in connexion with the past, are of too solemn and sacred a character to be thus paraded before the public knowledge; and the only means of avoiding such an alternative, is for me to retire to a foreign clime, and there pass the remainder of my days. I shall enjoy peace of mind, if not happiness. You and my other dear children will correspond with me frequently: perhaps sometimes, as you will all be in affluence, you will come and visit me in my retreat. Now, dearest Mary, not a word of remonstrance—not a single syllable in the hope of dissuading me from my purpose! It is irrevocably settled."

I wept; but I ventured not to argue against my father's decision: I saw that it was useless—and moreover that it would be undutiful on my part to combat it, after his solemn adjuration to the contrary.

"In me, Mary," he continued, "you behold a man so changed by the cruel circumstances through which he has passed and the terrible recollections which throng in his memory, as well as by the deeds which have made him a criminal in his own estimation, that he is scarcely fitted for human companionship. Therefore was it that last night I refused to take up my abode with you; and in that resolve am I still fixed. Listen, Mary—and do not interrupt me. You have friends who will visit you—and it is not necessary that they should encounter me. I do not wish it. The worthy woman who is the mistress of this house, knows that I am your father; I shall likewise meet my other dear children here; and I shall see your future husband. But beyond this limited circle it is needless that any one at all connected with you, should know who I am. For the many reasons which I have already set forth as the inducements that prompt me to go abroad, the secret of my existence in the land of the living cannot be too closely kept. One week more therefore shall I remain in London; and every day will I see you. Now my intentions and purposes are fully explained; and we will repair immediately to the house where our lamented Sarah sleeps in death. Come, Mary—let us proceed thither."

I suggested that no delay ought to take place in communicating to William and Jane their poor sister's death; and, my father at once coinciding, I wrote two notes, one of which I despatched to Mr. Appleton's in the City, and the other to Lord Chilstone's in Grosvenor Square. In both I made an appointment for two o'clock in the afternoon, at

which hour William and Jane were to be at the lodgings to meet their father.

We now set off to Camden Town. Being naturally averse to aught savouring of parade and ostentation—especially under such mournful circumstances as those in which we were placed—I did not order my carriage for the purpose of conveying us thither—but we proceeded in a hackney-coach; and on reaching the place, found that Mrs. Chaplin, faithful to her promise, had superintended the laying-out of the deceased, and had already given some instructions with regard to the funeral. Sincerely did we thank the good woman for her kindness; and alone together did we ascend to the chamber where the dead lay. With solemnly mournful feelings did we enter the room: we closed the door, and in turn pressed our lips to the marble countenance of the corpse. Its aspect was serene: there was not the slightest indication on the features of any internal struggle having taken place at the moment of dissolution. Thus the impression we received at the time, of the tranquillity which marked the separation of soul and body, was fully confirmed. I will not however dwell too long upon the melancholy details in respect to my sister's death—but will at once proceed to observe that having remained some time at the house, and given certain instructions to the undertaker, my father and I, accompanied by Mrs. Chaplin, returned to Conduit Street.

Punctually at two o'clock William and Jane made their appearance, the former having been to Grosvenor Square to fetch the latter and escort her to my abode. The meeting between our father and those two was affecting to a degree: it was a long time before their feelings could be composed sufficiently for consecutive discourse. Our poor father surveyed them one after the other with mingled affection and admiration: and, indeed, he had every reason to be proud of them. William was tall, somewhat slightly built, but very well made: that delicacy of appearance which had characterized him in his earlier years, and had rendered him so interesting a boy, had given place to a more manly vigour; while his countenance retained all its open and honest frankness. Like myself and our deceased sister, he had dark hair and eyes, and somewhat delicate features—thus reminding our father of his deceased wife. Jane had dark brown hair and blue eyes: and though her profile had a strong family resemblance, she was nevertheless more like our father, or what he was in his earlier years, than like our deceased mother. These distinctions of resemblances, as a matter of course, constantly occur in families: but it was the great likeness which Jane bore to our father, and the much less likeness which existed between the rest of his children and himself, that had so fatally tended to confirm his suspicion of his deceased wife's frailty. And here, when I think of it, I may mention another circumstance to which I have found no previous opportunity of so specially alluding, but which, as my narrative draws to a close, I must not omit to glance at. It is a painful one—and therefore the sooner disposed of the better. The reader is already aware of the mode in which Sir Wyndham Clavering unfortunately came by his death: in short, his throat was cut. But when taken from the river, this circumstance was not discovered by the medical exa-

miner, from the simple fact that the corpse was shockingly decomposed through having been several weeks in the water, and the fishes and vermin had preyed upon it, naturally fixing chiefly upon that part which the knife had laid open. Indeed, it was observed at the inquest that the greater portion of the neck was eaten away; and thus the actual cause of death remained undiscovered at the time.

In my notes to William and Jane I had acquainted them with their sister's death—but I had given them no details. They were painfully affected: indeed, their grief may be better imagined than described; and floods of tears were shed by us all, while, in a voice frequently broken by sobs, I gave my brother and sister the particulars attending poor Sarah's demise. I told them, moreover, that the undertaker had received instructions to transport her remains to my abode; and that, therefore, on the morrow, when William and Jane should repeat their visit, they would have the mournful opportunity of gazing for the last time upon their perished sister. They passed the rest of that day with our father and me; and in the evening I was again alone.

I must now observe that I had written to Eustace the first thing in the morning, to tell him all that had taken place—my sister's death and my father's re-appearance;—and as I gave him to understand that in consequence of those events there were painful duties to be performed, and meetings to take place between the restored parent and his other two children, the day must be devoted to such purposes. He therefore came not: but he sent me a letter of most affectionate condolence on account of Sarah's death. Before I retired to rest I penned a few lines in reply, asking him to call next day to be introduced to my father. It was between nine and ten o'clock on the following morning that Sarah's remains, enclosed in their coffin, which had been expeditiously made, were brought to my abode. Soon afterwards my father came: a little later Eustace Quentin arrived likewise. He behaved towards my father in the kindest manner and with the most generous spirit—and therefore confirmed, by his deportment and language, the admirable impression already made upon my parent's mind, by what Barbauld Azetha had, at different times, told him in respect to my intended husband. William and Jane presently called—the former bringing me a kind note from Mr. Appleton, and the latter a most affectionate one from the Countess of Chilstone.

Four days afterwards the funeral took place; and the remains of Sarah were consigned to the same grave in which her elder brother already slept. Our father, William, Eustace Quentin, and the medical gentleman who had attended her in her last illness, were present at the ceremony. I ordered a tomb to be erected over the spot where Robert and Sarah lay; and it is to me a source of ineffable consolation, when I think of the death of this brother and this sister, that whatever may have been the errors of their short career, they died in penitence and resignation, and that it was given to me to pray by the bed-side of each and to be with them in their supreme moments.

Two days after the funeral, my father took his departure for the Continent. His resolve in this respect was inflexible; and when I attempted to

dissuade him, which I did in the last moments, he besought me not to address him in that manner. He consented to receive from me the sum of two hundred pounds a-year: I conjured him not to pain me by thus regulating his future income at so wretchedly insignificant a standard, when I myself should be in the enjoyment of great riches: but here also he was inexorable. I entreated him likewise that he would permit me to accompany him for a few months, or at least a few weeks: but not even to this proposal would he assent. Lastly I conjured him to suffer me to convey him as far as Dover or Canterbury, it being my own intention to return into Kent: but no—he said the moment for parting had come, that it was useless to postpone it, and that the bitterness of separation being as it were already past, he would go forth alone and at once upon his journey to a foreign clime. Very painful were the farewells now spoken between my father on one side and his three surviving children on the other: we embraced him again and again—and then the door closed behind him!

CHAPTER CLXIII.

CLAVERING HALL.

IN consequence of all the excitement I had gone through, I felt the necessity of a short period of seclusion, in order to compose my mind: and moreover decency ordained that for a period I should retire from the world to mourn for my lost sister. With the proprieties of society in this respect my own feelings were consentaneous; and when I announced my wish to Eustace, he did not seek to dissuade me from my intention. As a matter of course there was not now the slightest reason wherefore we should not correspond as frequently as we chose; and with this knowledge he consoled himself for our temporary separation. Before I left London, Mr. Crosby, the solicitor, called upon me to announce the satisfactory arrangement of all the matters which I had placed in his hand: every formality in respect to my own inheritance was accomplished—the Royal permission had been obtained for the addition of the surname of Clavering to my own—and the fortune which Mrs. Whitfield had left my sisters, and which according to the provisions of her will, now all belonged to Jane, was duly invested in my name as her trustee until she should come of age. I must add that by a letter received from Ashford I learnt that the old house having been thoroughly examined, no additional hoard of money was discovered. Acting by Mr. Crosby's advice, I gave orders for that house to be sold, with a view to have the amount it might produce bought into the funds and added to my sister's fortune.

Before leaving London, I had a long conversation with William in reference to his own prospects. I represented to him that as I was rich, he need have no care for the future; for that it would be my delight as well as duty to ensure his independence. But he declared that he was enamoured of the medical profession, and that even if he himself had become possessed of wealth, he should still pursue it. From this resolve I did not attempt to dissuade him,—knowing how much better it was for a young man, however excellent his principles, to have a

settled occupation : but I insisted upon making him a handsome allowance, so that he might pursue his studies with greater advantage, possess himself of a fine library, and maintain that position which he was taking in the world and which the wealth of his relatives entitled him to assume. Being unable to offer Mr. Appleton any pecuniary recompense for all the kindness which he had shown William, and for his determination to keep him at his house until the completion of his medical studies, I testified my gratitude by a present of a sumptuous service of silver plate, on which I cheerfully expended several hundred pounds.

All my arrangements being completed in London, and having bade farewell to those whom I left behind, I took my departure, accompanied by Eliza, in the travelling-carriage. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when I reached Clavering Hall ; and the domestics came forth to receive me with sympathizing condolence expressed on their countenances, as they knew the loss I had sustained. In the course of a few days all the surrounding families of the nobility and gentry called to leave their cards at the Hall : but they did not seek my presence, knowing that I was in mourning for a sister very recently dead. A month now elapsed, during which I seldom passed beyond the boundaries of my estate—and then only in my occasional rides in the carriage : my walks were confined to my own grounds—and the greater portion of my time was passed in reading. But every day did I visit the picture-gallery which was fraught with so many affecting reminiscences for me,—the portrait of Sir Wyndham Clavering forcibly reminding me of all those strange and romantic circumstances which in their development had led to my being possessed of that splendid mansion and that fine estate. There was another avocation which I undertook, and which I may take leave to glance at. I instructed Mr. Tufnell to discover and report to me all cases of illness and distress amongst the poor of the surrounding neighbourhood ; and it was to me a source of gratification to be enabled to make him the almoner of such bounty as my wealth enabled me to dispense.

I did not forget Mrs. Messiter and her family ; and one day I sent Tufnell across to Dover to see them. On his return he informed me that Mr. Messiter had in respect to drink become quite a reformed character—that he had gone entirely from one extreme to the other, and was a perfect fanatic in his advocacy of the disuse of all alcoholic beverages. I could not help thinking that no fanaticism was ever more commendable, and that no departure from one extreme to another was ever to be more applauded. I only hoped that it would last. It appeared that Mr. Messiter had taken a chapel, where he held forth on Sundays, and during the week gave lectures upon his new doctrine of total abstinence. His wife and children were far more comfortable than they had been : but from what Tufnell told me, there was still the drawback to their happiness in the fact that Mr. Messiter continued to play the part of a domestic tyrant ; and in as delicate language as he could possibly use, my faithful steward likewise gave me to understand that Mr. Messiter paid a little more attention towards two or three females who were amongst the most admiring of his congregation, than was pleasing to his wife. Tufnell had presented the

poor woman, in my name, with a sum of money amply sufficient to introduce many comforts into her little household.

One day, at the expiration of about a month after I had taken up my abode at Clavering Hall, I received a letter in an unknown hand ; and on opening it, was startled to observe the ominous address of *Newgate* on the top. Hastily turning over the leaf to get at the name of the writer, I perceived to my astonishment that it was Theobald Maitland. On perusing the epistle, I found it to be couched in the most humble and grovelling terms,—imploing my pardon for all the delinquencies of which he had been guilty towards me, and entreating my succour to save him from utter ruin and lasting ignominy. He entered into the fullest details of his case. It appeared that driven to desperation after the failure of his nefarious design upon me at Ashford, he had returned to London, where he committed a forgery for two hundred pounds, the detection of which within the last few days had led to his arrest and committal for trial : but he stated that if, through the kindness to which he now appealed, the amount were paid to the holder of the forged bill, this individual would not come forward to prosecute. Maitland went on very candidly to state that his mere release from gaol would be of comparatively no benefit to himself, as he would be thrown upon the world in even a worse condition than before—and that his object was to get abroad to Australia, where he might have a chance of obtaining his livelihood respectably in future. He implored and entreated me not to leave his letter unnoticed,—urgently representing that I had it in my power to effect the salvation of a fellow-creature, and appealing in terms as grovelling as they were piteous to my bounty on his behalf. I did not exactly know what course to adopt. It appeared to me that to furnish him with the means of satisfying his prosecutor, was to cheat justice of its due : but then I reflected that I should not hesitate to adopt such a course if any near relative or dear friend became unhappily involved in such a dilemma. Wherefore, then, should I not stretch a point and conquer a punctilio in respect to any other fellow-creature ? Yes—even though I had been the object of his vilest machinations. Having thus partially made up my mind, I wrote to Eustace, enclosing Theobald Maitland's letter, and likewise a draft on my London banker for five hundred pounds, desiring Captain Quentin to use his own discretion in the matter. In a few days I received an account of the result. Eustace had instructed his attorney to make the necessary arrangement for the settlement of Maitland's serious liability ; and as the Assizes were being held at the time in the Old Bailey, the criminal was discharged in the absence of the prosecutor. Eustace had then sent for him to Wilber-ton House—where, I should observe, he was now residing with his brother ; and having remonstrated seriously with Maitland on the evil courses he had been pursuing, he made him this proposition—that the passage-money to Sydney should be paid, and a small sum given him for his necessary outfit—and that the remainder, amounting to above two hundred pounds, should be paid to him at a banker's in Sydney on his arrival there. This proposition was gratefully accepted—that is to say, with as

much gratitude as a man of Maitland's character could possibly display; and Eustace had seen him embark on the day previous to which I received this letter. Before his departure, however, Maitland had requested the Hon. Captain Quentin to express to me his best thanks for an amount of kindness which he knew that he so little merited. I was glad that the man was thus disposed of, inasmuch as he was a dangerous character, and in the desperation of his circumstances might again have looked to me as the means of building up his ruined fortunes, and thus have devised some new scheme against my peace and safety. I wrote to the Kingstons to tell them what I had done; and the letter I received in reply, expressed the warmest admiration of my conduct on the part of the Squire and his excellent wife.

I am now about to enter upon one of the most remarkable episodes of human life that ever came within the range of my own experience, or in any way associated itself with my personal history. One day, as I was contemplating the portrait of Sir Wyndham Clavering in the picture-gallery, the idea stole into my mind that I should like to see the house in which my mother had lived for so many years with Mrs. Burgess. The reader will perhaps understand the species of curiosity which prompted me, and that it was not a mere idle sentiment, but one characterized by a sanctity all its own. For everything in any way associated with the memory of a deceased parent, thus becomes hallowed in the estimation of the offspring left behind; and there is a melancholy pleasure in contemplating the scenes or the spots where the lost one lived and moved, passed through trials, and endured sufferings. Accordingly, I one afternoon drove over to Canterbury, and alighting at the *Fountain Hotel*, made inquiries of the worthy old landlord, Mr. Wright, to ascertain whether he had ever known anything of Mrs. Burgess. He had been for a great number of years located in Canterbury; and I thought it possible that he could give me the information I sought. Nor was I mistaken: for he not merely remembered the name well, but had been personally acquainted with her. He spoke highly of her character, and alluded to the beautiful niece that she had living with her until her death. Oh! he little knew that it was of my own mother that he thus spoke; and I did not of course reveal to him the secret—as it might have led to questions, or at least to strange conjectures on his part, how the daughter of Mrs. Burgess's niece could have been held in any way connected with the Clavering family. Indeed I gave no reasons at all for putting the queries that I addressed to him; and he did not seek to penetrate my motives. I elicited from him where the house was situated, and walked forth alone to proceed in that direction.

Being tolerably familiar with Canterbury, I had no difficulty in finding my way—and at length reached the suburb to which I had been directed. Several new houses had recently sprung up there: but I soon recognised, without any farther inquiry, the one that I sought—for the landlord of the hotel had accurately described it to me. It was a small but neat habitation, with a little garden in front, and a much larger one behind; and though it was now verging towards the close of November, a number of evergreens, some of considerable height, gave

the place a cheerful aspect. There was a portico, over which in the summer time, as the landlord informed me, the clematis twined, mingled with clustering roses, and thus enhancing the picturesque appearance of the dwelling. I stood at a little distance to contemplate it; and ineffable emotions swelled my heart as I thus looked upon the place where my mother had dwelt. Perhaps her feet had often pressed the ground where I myself now stood: doubtless from the gateway of that little garden she had been wont to watch for the approach of Sir Wyndham Clavering? The house was evidently tenanted by decent people: for the blinds at the windows were of scrupulous cleanliness, and there was a general air of neatness pervading the exterior of the habitation and the front garden. I wished that I had inquired of the landlord who now lived there: I felt that I should like to enter that house—to see the rooms where my mother had sat—to behold where she had pursued her avocation in imparting knowledge to the juvenile mind. I approached nearer: I stood lingeringly at the fence which enclosed the garden: I passed slowly by—and then I retraced my steps. I could not tear myself away.

I saw a female countenance at the window: it was that of a middle-aged lady; and I observed that there was something benevolent and melancholy in the expression of her features. I was near enough to see this much: but suddenly recollecting that it would appear strange for me to be observed lingering and loitering about the premises, I was on the point of moving away, when that countenance was suddenly withdrawn from the window—the front door opened—and the lady herself came out. She was, as I already judged her, a very respectable-looking person—neatly though plainly clad—and having the air of one possessing a little competency enabling her to live in comfort in a house of that small extent. Hastening towards the garden-gate, she said, with mingled kindness and respect, "Is there anything I can do for you, Miss? Pardon my boldness—but it struck me that you were looking for some particular house, or wished to make some inquiry."

There was a certain degree of benevolence in the lady's manner and the tones of her voice, that decided me upon making known my wish to see the interior of the dwelling.

"I thank you for your civility," was my answer, "and will tell you frankly what has brought me hither. One whose memory is very dear to me, dwelt many long years ago in this house. I have never been on the spot before——"

"I understand you, Miss!" exclaimed the gentlewoman: "you wish to see the inside as well as the exterior. If my conjecture be right, pray walk in: or in any case do me the favour to enter and rest yourself."

I at once accepted the invitation, and was shown into a small parlour very neatly furnished: indeed the appearance of the interior of the habitation served to corroborate my conjecture that the occupants were persons of sufficient though limited means. But as yet I had only seen the lady herself, and a decently attired servant-girl, who had come forward to close the front-door after we entered. But still I felt convinced that the gentlewoman dwelt not alone in the house: for on one side of

the table there was some knitting, and on the opposite side some other kind of work—thus indicating the pursuits of two females.

"Pray sit down," said the lady, motioning me to a chair near the fire, which was blazing cheerfully in the grate. "Will you permit me to offer you some refreshment? Do not say no, if you feel an inclination: it would give me the greatest pleasure—for there is something in your countenance—pardon me for saying so, which greatly interests me in you. But you are weeping—Ah! I comprehend! the image of the dear one to whom you have alluded, is uppermost in your mind."

I answered that it was so; and the kind lady surveyed me with a touching mournfulness and interest in the expression of her countenance. I thanked her for her offer of refreshments, but declined—assuring her that I lived at no great distance, and had partaken of luncheon previous to my departure from home. I asked her how long she had dwelt in this house? and she said only a year. She went on to tell me that she was the widow of a lieutenant in the navy, who was killed at the Battle of Navarino in the year 1827—that she had an only daughter, who was about nineteen years of age—and that her pension, together with the interest of a little prize-money her husband had made in his time, gave her a small but sufficient income. I also learnt that her name was Craven, and that her daughter was called Isabella. All these details she gave me in an easy unaffected manner, and with a friendly confidence totally apart from the spirit of gossiping garrulity.

"I did not think," I said, feeling the necessity of announcing my own name in return, "that when I just now approached this house, I should set foot over its threshold—much less experience so kind a welcome. Permit me to state that I am Miss Price Clavering; and should circumstances ever bring you in the neighbourhood of my abode, it will afford me pleasure to receive you as hospitably as you have greeted me."

"And you are Miss Price Clavering?" said Mrs. Craven, again surveying me with interest depicted in her looks. "I have heard of you—yes, I have heard of you often. Wait one moment?"—and with this somewhat abrupt ejaculation she as suddenly quitted the room. It however immediately struck me that she was going to fetch her daughter, of whom she had spoken with a certain degree of melancholy which I could not understand. While she remained absent, I looked around the parlour in which I was seated: and there was again a gush of tender memories through my soul. Doubtless on that very spot where I was placed, my mother had often sat: doubtless in this room she had thought with joy of him whom she had loved: and doubtless here too she had poured forth tears of anguish for the loss of her benefactress Mrs. Burgess! Perhaps it might have been also in this room that Lady Clavering had told her the foul falsehood of her son's infidelity—perhaps it was here that that bad woman had levelled insults and threats against the unfortunate Marietta! The tears rolled down my cheeks as these reflections passed through my mind: but I hastily wiped those tears away, on hearing footsteps descend the stairs.

The door opened and Mrs. Craven re-appeared, followed by her daughter, with whose beauty I was

immediately struck. She was tall and slender, but well proportioned, and of exceeding gracefulness. Her complexion was delicately fair, with only just the faintest tint of the delicate rose-bud upon her cheeks to save them from perfect paleness. Her hair was dark brown, singularly luxuriant, and falling in rich heavy tresses upon her well-shaped shoulders. Her eyes were of a deep blue, with lashes of ebony darkness. Her nose was slightly aquiline; but her features were by no means boldly profiled: on the contrary, they were delicately chiselled; and the lips were cut like those of the most perfect Grecian statue. They were of bright vermilion; and when parting, revealed teeth as white as pearls. The expression of her countenance was pensive, even to melancholy, and at the first glance it struck me that there was something vacant in it, notwithstanding its touching sweetness: but this was presently explained. Altogether she was an angelic creature—one to whom my heart was immediately attracted, and whom I felt that I could love.

I have described Isabella Craven as she was wont to appear: but now as she entered the room, there was a certain tremulousness visibly agitating her, and a certain degree of excited feeling which made the colour deepen, at one moment, on her cheeks, and depart altogether the next. But yet there was a certain fixity of the eyes which struck me with that impression of a partial vacancy of look which characterized her. I at once extended my hand—but to my surprise it was not accepted: and then the mother hastened to say, "Isabella dear, Miss Clavering offers you her hand."

The daughter at once stretched out her own—but in a manner which, together with Mrs. Craven's words, revealed to me the lamentable fact that she was blind. Seized with a feeling of the deepest commiseration for this sweet creature, I pressed her hand with the warmest effusion; and she clasped mine with a reciprocal fervour. I saw, too, the tears trickling down her cheeks—her lips quivering with emotion—and her bosom heaving with the heart's swelling. I could have embraced her—I could have folded her in my arms: for I felt that I loved her all in an instant. She sat down in that chair near the side of the table where the needle-work lay; and her countenance was turned towards me, as if with her inward vision she was contemplating, through the medium of her own ideal, one whose image struck not upon her outward sight.

"You must pardon me, Miss Clavering," Mrs. Craven proceeded to observe, "that I quitted you so abruptly ere now: but I knew that my daughter would be glad to meet you—and expecting her to return every moment to the room, I hastened to anticipate her coming by telling her whom she would find here. I said that your name is not unknown to us," she added quickly: "we have frequently heard of you before."

"You have a beautiful place, I believe, Miss Clavering, at a short distance from Canterbury?" Isabella Craven hastened to observe.

"Where I shall be gratified to receive your mother and yourself," I answered. "The recent death of a sister has hitherto prevented me from seeking any society: for six weeks past I have been living in almost complete seclusion: but you will permit me to come shortly and fetch you to pass a

day with me at my residence? It will afford me pleasure."

"We thank you, Miss Clavering," responded the mother, with some degree of gravity; "but we never go out into society. Isabella's affliction has made us adopt this resolve."

I did not press my invitation under such circumstances. Indeed, I did not think that it was declined with quite so much frank courtesy and open-hearted affability as had hitherto characterized Mrs. Craven's demeanour towards me: but I made allowances on account of her daughter's misfortune, and of course did not show that I was in any way annoyed. Isabella however, with that intuitive keenness of mental perception which characterizes the blind, noticed that her mother had spoken somewhat too formally and seriously in declining my invitation; and she hastened to observe, "Do not think, Miss Clavering, that we are the less grateful for your kindness; but be assured that we appreciate it."

"We do, we do," said Mrs. Craven hastily and emphatically: then, as if to turn the discourse into another channel, she immediately observed, "Perhaps, Miss Clavering, you would like to see the rest of my humble dwelling? I remember what you told me—that one whose memory is dear to you once lived beneath this roof. I can understand the feeling which hallows such associations. Come with me—you shall visit every room that thus possesses an interest for you."

I accordingly followed Mrs. Craven, who took me over the house, Isabella remaining in the little parlour. When we returned thither, I noticed that she was engaged with the needle-work; and that she pursued it with a skillfulness which would have prevented any person from suspecting her blindness, unless previously acquainted with the fact. I almost immediately took my leave, expressing my grateful thanks for the kind reception I had experienced. But I did not receive an invitation to renew my visit: nor did I repeat my proposal for Mrs. Craven and her daughter to come to Clavering Hall. Retracing my way to the hotel, I entered the carriage, which was soon got in readiness, and returned home. For all the rest of that day I continued thinking of Isabella Craven. I felt irresistibly attracted towards her: there was something so touchingly sweet, so pensively interesting in her countenance, her manner, and her voice, that it was impossible not to like her. But why had my invitation to the Hall been so decisively refused by the mother? One would have thought that she might be glad of an opportunity to afford her daughter any rational recreation, considering the monotonous kind of life which she was evidently leading, and to which her affliction to a certain extent doomed her. Perhaps it was that with an exceeding delicacy and susceptibility of feeling, Mrs. Craven feared lest her afflicted child should be a burden in the house of strangers? or perhaps it might be that she was apprehensive that after a visit of pleasure, Isabella would feel still more severely that monotony of existence to which I have alluded and to which she would have to return? Such were the reflections that passed through my mind as I sought by means of conjecture a more positive reason than that which was apparent at the time for the refusal of my invitation.

In respect to that vacancy of look which I had noticed the moment I first beheld her, it was of course explained by the circumstance of her blindness,—the eyes having a certain fixity for want of the power to wander from object to object, as sight is accustomed to travel. But there was nothing disagreeable in that partial fixity: nor did it impair the general sweetness of the look and the loveliness of the countenance. In respect to the eyes themselves, I may add that it would have been impossible to discover, from their appearance, that the power of vision was gone. Nor was their lustre dimmed: on the contrary, they were bright and beautiful, their blue of the deepest shade, without the slightest blemish. By what cause had she experienced this great affliction? I did not think that she had been blind from her birth, because some few remarks she had made showed an acquaintance with things that could only have been obtained by the medium of sight enjoyed at some period of her existence: but that she had been blind for a considerable time, I did conceive, not merely from the practised skill with which she pursued her needle-work, but also from the manner in which she had entered the room and moved about, without using her hands to feel for objects to guide her, and with the evident experience of one accustomed to make all her other faculties serve as well as possible in indemnification for the lost one.

On the following day I again reflected on the position of this beautiful and afflicted creature; and I wondered whether she had ever received the benefit of the best advice that could be obtained in the metropolis. Impelled by curiosity, as well as by some inchoating design with regard to Isabella Craven, I repaired after breakfast to my library; and from its well-stored shelves took down encyclopædias, and all works I could find containing articles on the subject in which I was now so interested. For several hours I read these articles with the utmost attention: I ascertained the various causes of blindness—especially those which left the eyes unimpaired to all outward appearance; and the longer I studied the question, the more did I entertain the hope that something might yet be done for the redemption of Isabella Craven from the darkness of an incessant night. Thus for two or three days did I return to the same subject; and when I had no more to read thereon, I began to reflect how I might put my project into execution. This project, as the reader may have surmised, was to procure the services of the most celebrated oculists for the beautiful creature on whose behalf I had conceived so profound an interest.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

ISABELLA CRAVEN.

ONE day, about a week after my visit to the house in which the Cravens dwelt, I wrote a note to Dr. Parkinson, the physician who had attended Sir Aubrey Clavering in his last illness, and who resided in the city of Canterbury. He was considered to be a gentleman of considerable abilities as well as great professional experience; and being acquainted with him, I had no hesitation in desiring him to call

upon me for the purpose which I had in view. He arrived in the course of the afternoon; and I began to explain the object for which I had requested his attendance.

"I must inform you," I said, "that circumstances led me about a week back to a house in Canterbury, where I beheld a young lady who is seriously afflicted, and in whom I conceived an immediate interest. Not only on account of her affliction am I thus interested—but likewise because of the amiability of her disposition and the sweetness of her manners. I fear that the limited means of her mother, who is a lieutenant's widow, may have prevented her from procuring for her daughter those professional services which might prove availing—"

"I do believe, Miss Clavering," exclaimed Dr. Parkinson, "that you are speaking of a young lady with whom I am tolerably well acquainted—I mean Miss Craven."

"The same!" I answered, agreeably surprised to find that the family was thus known to the physician: but the next instant a sudden feeling of sadness came upon me, as I thought to myself that Isabella's ease must be hopeless, inasmuch as I now learnt that she had not been without good professional attention, and yet her affliction continued unremoved.

"Do you think," I asked, "that her sight is gone for ever?"

"I fear so," responded the physician. "But I must tell you as frankly, Miss Clavering, as I have already explained to Mrs. Craven, that I do not profess to be largely experienced in matters regarding the eyes. The avocation of an oculist is a special and distinct branch of the profession."

"This is precisely the idea that I had entertained," I observed; "and you can perhaps now understand that entertaining so deep an interest in Miss Craven, it is my object, if the transaction can be conducted with all due delicacy for the feelings of herself and her mother, to furnish the means of procuring the best professional advice."

"This is indeed very generous on your part, Miss Clavering," replied the physician: "but I fear that your excellent purpose has already been anticipated, inasmuch as when Miss Craven first lost her sight about four years ago, she received the attention of the most eminent oculists in London, without any effect. It is this circumstance which led me just now to express my opinion that little hope existed for the restoration of the young lady's sight. Her health is somewhat delicate; and it is for this reason that I have attended her professionally, and not in direct reference to her loss of vision."

"You apprehend, therefore," I said, in mournful inquiry, "that nothing can be done for her?"

"I would not go so far as that," rejoined Dr. Parkinson. "There are French and German oculists of greater experience and skill than even the most eminent of our London ones; and within the last year or two the name of Hermann Wertheim has become celebrated above all others."

"And he is a German, I presume?"

"Yes—he resides in Hanover. His practice has become commensurate with his fame; and I regret to say that he is greedy of gold. The fees he exacts are enormous from those who visit him: but if you entertain the design of inviting him to England, he

would demand a very large sum, even if he would come at all."

"Do you think it practicable," I asked, "to induce Mrs. Craven to take her daughter to Hanover and consult Dr. Wertheim, if she were provided with ample means for the purpose?"

"I cannot say," responded the physician. "But this much I will tell you, Miss Clavering—that in the present state of Isabella Craven's mind, it would be dangerous to subject her to the excitement of a protracted suspense, which she would naturally feel during the interval that must be occupied in so long a journey."

"But if Dr. Wertheim," I suggested, "could be induced to visit England, do you think that Mrs. Craven would allow him to operate on her daughter's eyes, if necessary—and that Isabella herself is in a state of health to enable her to undergo such operation?"

"Decidedly! I answer in the affirmative, Miss Clavering, to both your questions. Mrs. Craven loves her daughter, and would give her own eyesight to restore that of her dear child. Miss Craven herself is now labouring under no indisposition, though her health is, as I have already said, somewhat delicate. It was more especially to the state of her mind that I referred when speaking of the imprudence of subjecting her to any prolonged excitement. Ah! I see that you do not understand me, Miss Clavering. There is a little history attached to Isabella Craven, which is full of the most touching pathos, and at the same time characterized by a deep romantic interest."

The physician paused; and I said nothing to encourage him to proceed,—being fearful of appearing too curious, and of encroaching on the sanctity of family secrets confided to him in his capacity of a professional attendant.

"When I was first called in to see Miss Craven," he resumed, "which was about a year ago—almost immediately after she and her mother settled in Canterbury and took up their abode at their present residence—I saw that the young lady was labouring under great despondency, and that the condition of her mind had much to do with the ailment she then experienced. It therefore became necessary for the mother to make me acquainted with the particulars of a strangely romantic attachment her daughter had formed. I need hardly say that the history was thus confided to me to a certain extent as a secret,—though no injunction was given, nor any pledge exacted, that I would regard it in such a light. Hitherto, however, the narrative has not passed my lips: but after all the kind interest which you, Miss Clavering, have shown on behalf of Isabella Craven—and considering the nobly generous intentions at which you have more than hinted—I think it only right and proper to acquaint you with that history. I am sure that I shall not be culpably violating the confidence reposed in me, nor departing from my duties as a medical man, by revealing the strange circumstances to your ears. On the contrary, it would be unhandsome and ungenerous to withhold from your knowledge whatsoever has come to mine, relative to this afflicted young lady."

"I do not seek to penetrate into family matters," I observed: "but you may rest assured, Dr. Parkinson, that if you think you can, without impro-



priety, enter into the narrative which so nearly concerns poor Miss Craven, your confidence shall not be abused."

Dr. Parkinson begged me to understand that such an assurance was quite unnecessary on my part; and he then proceeded to unfold the following strange and truly romantic history:—

"Seven years ago Lieutenant Craven was killed in the battle of Navarino. At that time Mrs. Craven was residing at Portsmouth with her daughter Isabella, then a girl of twelve. She was a day-scholar at a very excellent ladies' establishment, and progressed with her studies in a manner highly satisfactory to her parents and her preceptress. Mrs. Craven continued to dwell at Portsmouth after her husband's death for about three years—when Isabella, being then fifteen, was seized with a very dangerous illness; and for some weeks her life was despaired of. It is easy

to picture to one-self how the widowed mother watched day and night by the bed-side of her child—and how great was her anguish at the apprehension that death might deprive her of the only tie that now held her to existence. But a naturally strong constitution eventually triumphed over that severe malady: in proportion, however, as physical strength came back, the power of vision declined. At first it was thought by the medical attendants that it was only through extreme weakness and the debilitating effects of illness that the sight was thus impairing, and that it would eventually resume all its pristine strength and keenness. But as day after day passed by, deeper became the obscurity which was gathering around Isabella Craven; and by the time her health was restored, she was involved in total darkness. Yet the lustre of the eyes had returned—the light which appeared to shine

in them, and which had been dimmed by illness, burnt up with renewed glory; and yet the power of vision was lost! This was a cruel affliction for Mrs. Craven: but still it was associated with some consolatory circumstances. In the first place the invalid was restored to health: the daughter was not lost to the mother. In the second place, the misfortune had come gradually, and not with the severity of a sudden blow: indeed it had been foreseen by the natural apprehensions of a parent, despite the assurances of the medical men that there was everything to hope. In the third place, Isabella herself endured this cruel affliction with so much sweet and pious resignation, and appeared so grateful to be restored to her mother even though at the sacrifice of one of the most precious gifts of heaven, that the calamity was much less terrible than if it had produced the wildest despair on the part of its victim."

"I can easily picture to myself," I observed, as Dr. Parkinson paused for a few moments, "with what a holy resignation poor Isabella Craven must have yielded herself to her sad destiny."

"It was so," continued the physician: "but nevertheless her mother was resolved that no expense should be spared, so far as her means would permit, to procure the best possible advice for her afflicted daughter. Accordingly, so soon as Isabella was entirely convalescent and able to undertake a journey, they removed to London, where the most eminent oculists were consulted. It soon became apparent to Mrs. Craven that there was a considerable difference of opinion amongst these professional gentlemen on the subject of her daughter's blindness; and after expending much more money than she could well afford, she was compelled to arrive at the conclusion that there was no help for Isabella. Indeed, such was the opinion given her by the most celebrated individual amongst the many whom she consulted: but he told her that if by means of a bracing air on the sea-coast Isabella could regain that vigorous health which she had been wont to enjoy previous to her severe malady, there was the chance of a gradual restoration of her eye-sight. Mrs. Craven accordingly thought of returning to Portsmouth, where her friends resided: but from this she was dissuaded by the eminent oculist to whom I am alluding, and who based his objection on the unhealthiness of that place compared with a few others which he named. Mrs. Craven, ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of her beloved daughter, required nothing more to induce her to forego her design of returning to Portsmouth; and she selected another watering-place, but which I do not exactly remember, even if the name were mentioned to me at all. However, to this sea-coast town did she remove with her daughter; and arriving there as total strangers, they made up their minds to live in as much seclusion as possible, and to concentrate all their little pleasures by the domestic hearth. It was about three years ago that they settled themselves at that watering-place; and for a year Isabella's health continued to improve. But still there was no sign of the returning power of vision. Nevertheless she continued to endure her calamity with a resignation which increased, if possible, rather than diminished; and this pious

submission on her part to what now seemed to be her irremediable destiny, was a source of infinite solace to the poor mother. But you yourself, Miss Clavering, even with a short hour's acquaintance, saw enough of Isabella Craven to comprehend all the sweetness of her angelic disposition—all the amiable ductility of her temper: and you may therefore have already conjectured that with *her* the privation of sight led to no peevishness of humour, nor fluctuation of moods—but she was ever the same placid, resigned, and I may almost say contented being that a saint would have become."

Here the physician paused again for a few moments; and then resumed his narrative in the following manner:—

"I now come to that incident to which I am specially desirous to direct your attention. You will perceive, by the periods of time which from recollection I have been enabled so accurately to mark, in respect to the movements and proceedings of the Cravens, that it was three years ago when they took up their residence at that watering-place, and during the first year the young lady's health improved. But at the expiration of that year—consequently about two years back—she was suddenly menaced with a return of her former malady; and medical assistance was at once summoned. Fortunately the skill of the surgeon thus timely called in, baffled the advance of illness: but for many weeks afterwards it became requisite for Isabella to take a great deal of strengthening medicine. The surgeon, having a most extensive practice, was wont, it appears, to send his assistant to make occasional inquiries after the health of those patients who were so far approaching convalescence as not to need his own special attention. This assistant was an exceedingly handsome young man—of genteel appearance and amiable manners—and with a voice which, though properly masculine in its tone, was nevertheless peculiarly harmonious. I do not know his name: I do not even know the name of the surgeon who was his employer: for when Mrs. Craven related all these circumstances to me, she was particularly guarded in the mode of describing them, and naturally endeavoured to be as little explicit as she could. Of course I sought not for farther information than she of her own accord chose to impart. However, to continue. This assistant of whom I am speaking, was accustomed to call twice or thrice a week, on his employer's behalf, at the residence of the Cravens. The mother, in order to break as much as possible the monotony of her afflicted daughter's existence, used to seize with avidity upon all new topics for conversation, so as to throw into her discourse as much variety as she could. It was therefore natural enough that as she herself became interested in that assistant, whose manner was so amiable and kind, and whose attentions were so affably rendered, that she should often speak of him when alone with her daughter; and utterly unforeseeing what would be the result, she described to Isabella that young man's personal appearance. Now, Isabella herself had not remained insensible to the melody of his voice; and his conversation had pleased her much. Thus, gradually, she experienced an attachment for that young man,—an attachment of which she herself was for some time unconscious, but which grew

and increased on every occasion that he called. Mrs. Craven, having taken a friendly liking to him, was wont to induce him by her courteous treatment, to prolong his visits somewhat—or, in more vulgar parlance, to sit and chat with herself and daughter. He and the surgeon were the only persons who had visited at the house: the surgeon himself had now ceased to call, or only did so at long intervals;—and thus the presence of the youthful assistant broke in, as it were, upon the monotonous routine of the Cravens' life. The youth possessed a cultivated intellect—self-cultivated, I believe; and his conversation was interesting, without the slightest display of pedantry or affectation. It is not, therefore, altogether to be wondered at, that Isabella should conceive an affection for the only young man with whom she was acquainted, and who had been so perfectly described to her by her mother. Doubtless the gentle heart of that afflicted girl felt, in obedience to nature's instincts, the necessity of loving something apart from the love which she cherished towards her parent: and when once this new love of her's had created for her imagination a hitherto unknown paradise, it was natural that she should abandon herself, as it were, to the pure and holy delight thus enjoyed. Mrs. Craven remained totally unsuspecting of her daughter's feelings towards the assistant; and there is every reason to believe that he himself was equally unaware of the love whereof he had become the object. It is likewise certain that he reciprocated it not; or if he did, the secret was cherished in his own bosom. However, an end came to that delightful day-dream to which poor Isabella had yielded. Her health was in a few months completely restored—the surgeon ordered the medicine to be discontinued—and there was no longer any need for the visits of the assistant. That the young man had regarded these visits almost entirely in a professional point of view, may be inferred from the fact that they ceased together with the necessity for paying them. Soon after this was it that the mother found out the state of the daughter's heart. Isabella grew unhappy; a change had evidently come over her: she sank into reveries—she often fell into fits of melancholy abstraction;—she no longer occupied herself with her piano or her needle-work—she was an altered creature. At first Mrs. Craven fancied that she was now beginning to feel her calamity in its bitterest intensity; and she redoubled her endeavours to soothe, cheer, and divert the poor girl's mind. But all these attempts proved unavailing. At length—one day, when taking their usual walk by the sea-side—Mrs. Craven observed the assistant approaching; and she mentioned the circumstance to her daughter. The tell-tale blush, the glow of pleasure which suddenly overspread Isabella's countenance, and the trembling which seized upon her entire form as she leant on her mother's arm,—all these struck upon Mrs. Craven's mind with the force of a revelation. She comprehended the secret at once. The young assistant accosted them, and remained for about five minutes in courteous conversation. The mother all the time studied well alike the countenance of Isabella and of that young man; and her suspicion was confirmed in respect to her daughter: while, on the other hand, she felt equally confident that the young man himself was not only unconscious of

the love which he had inspired, but that he also failed to reciprocate it. When Mrs. Craven and Isabella reached their abode, an affecting scene took place. Gently, and in the most delicate terms, did the mother question her well-beloved child; and the latter, throwing herself into her parent's arms, confessed that she loved that young man. But it was only since his visits were discontinued that the poor girl herself had rightly understood the nature of her own feelings, and had comprehended the meaning of that sentiment which she had heard spoken of as love. Mrs. Craven had now again to exert all her powers to calm, console, and cheer her afflicted daughter. She represented to her the necessity of exercising all her fortitude in order to triumph over this unfortunate passion: she conjured her to stifle it in her bosom, if she would not have it prove the source of unhappiness for a life-time;—and she even appealed to all the natural delicacy and propriety of Isabella's sentiments in order to strengthen the force of her own reasoning.”

“I can indeed full well understand,” was the comment I now interjected, at this point of the physician's narrative, “how affecting was the scene that then took place, and how painful was the task which Mrs. Craven had to accomplish.”

“Yes,” continued Dr. Parkinson: “it is indeed, full easy for imagination to depict that afflicted mother straining to her bosom that still more afflicted daughter, and mingling the most wholesome counsel with the most endearing caresses. Isabella promised that she would cherish in her soul every word that had come from her mother's lips—and that she would exert all the energy of her mind to triumph over the affection so romantically but fatally conceived. Weeks wore on; and Isabella so far kept her promise, and so far succeeded, that she resumed her wonted avocations—she struggled against those fits of melancholy abstraction which stole upon her—she endeavoured to smile and to seem cheerful. But the mother saw plainly enough that it was merely another calamity to which she was resigning herself, and not one that could be triumphantly battled against. Now and then they encountered the assistant in their walks; and Mrs. Craven afterwards observed that for some days, on each occasion, Isabella's spirits drooped painfully, and that it was with difficulty she could conquer her feelings. She therefore resolved to remove from that place; and when she mentioned her determination to Isabella, the poor girl courageously acquiesced. That was about eighteen months ago. They repaired to a neighbouring watering-place, where they remained about half-a-year; but as Isabella's health began to decline again, fresh medical assistance was summoned—and this time Mrs. Craven was assured that the bleakness of the sea-coast was too severe for her daughter, who ought to dwell in some inland town. Another removal followed; and now it was to Canterbury—to the residence which they at present occupy.”

Dr. Parkinson ceased; and for some minutes I sat pondering upon this strangely romantic narrative. At length I said, “Does Miss Craven still cherish an affection towards that young man?”

“She does,” was the answer. “There can be no doubt that his image is indelibly impressed upon her heart. Her resignation is now twofold

it is a resignation to the loss of vision, and a resignation to disappointed love. Ah! Miss Clavering, boundless is the pity with which I have regarded that beautiful creature! I am not much given to the perusal of novels, nor to the study of the heart's affection in the way that it is delineated in the page of the romancist: but assuredly there must be something indescribably æsthetic in those pure feelings with which Isabella Craven was inspired towards that young man. If I possessed great wealth and had no family of my own to assert prior claims upon my worldly care, I would ascertain if possible who that young man is—I would seek him out—I would open to his knowledge the fact that a beautiful and an afflicted being had learnt to love him on account of his moral excellences and his intellectual qualifications far more than for his manly comeliness—I would endow him with a competency that he might make that being his bride and devote his life to the ensuring of her happiness! Yes, all this would I do," added Dr. Parkinson with enthusiasm in his voice and upon his countenance; "so immense is the commiseration and so great the interest which I experience on behalf of Isabella Craven!"

I remained silent and reflected—for I also was deeply touched, and I also felt a boundless pity for the object of our discourse. At length I said, "Whatever may be afterwards done, Dr. Parkinson, towards ensuring the happiness of Isabella Craven, the first step is to carry out the view originally formed. I therefore authorize you to put yourself in immediate communication with Dr. Hermann Wertheim. Ask him to come to England—proffer him his own terms—tell him that the amount for which he may stipulate, shall be paid him on the moment of his arrival—and that it shall be doubled if success should crown his endeavours to restore the blessing of sight to an amiable and interesting girl. But in the meantime not a word to the Cravens! The secret rests between you and me. Should Dr. Wertheim's answer be favourable—and it *must* be—I am sure it will; for you can write earnestly and energetically—we may then deliberate farther as to the course to be adopted in making known our views and proceedings to Mrs. Craven, that she in her own manner may break them to her daughter."

"I will do your bidding in all things, Miss Clavering," responded the physician: and he then took his departure.

CHAPTER CLXV.

A VISITRESS AND VISITOR.

I WAS sitting in the drawing-room in the evening, writing a letter to Eustace Quentin in reply to one which I had received from him in the morning, when a servant entered to inform me that a female, who said that it was unnecessary to give any name, desired to see me. I rather suspected, by this mysterious mode of proceeding, that it was Barbauld Azetha, and I at once gave orders for her to be shown up. My surmise was correct: my visitress was the Gipsy Queen. I gave her a cordial welcome; and after a few remarks had been

exchanged, she said, addressing me very solemnly, "My dear Mary—for you must still permit me to address you in this familiar manner—I am come to bid you farewell for ever."

I gazed upon her in astonishment: but I saw by the gravity of her looks that her resolve was firmly taken.

"Yes," she continued, "it is my intention to leave England without delay; and my destination is the United States. There, in the New World, I shall commence a new career. I am wearied of the life I have been leading—sick of the cheats and impostures which characterize the avocations of my race. The bounty of him whom I once loved so well, and whose memory since his death has become dear to me again, has placed me in a position not only of comfort, but of affluence. I have severed all the ties that connected me with my people: I am the Gipsy Queen no longer."

"But wherefore should you thus expatriate yourself?" I asked, with a mournful feeling at the idea of losing one who had atoned by so many acts of friendship towards me and mine, for the ill which she had at first made me suffer at her hands.

"Expatriate myself?" she said, repeating my words interrogatively. "You speak, my dear Mary, as if this were my own country—or as if indeed there were any country which I could properly call my home. The gipsies are like the Jews—a nation without a native land. No, Mary, it is not self-exile: it is merely a removal from one clime to another,—from a clime where I am known to one where I shall be unknown,—from a clime where old associations and ties hang upon me with a tenacity which could not be shaken off, to a clime where I may initiate other circumstances and enter upon another career! My gipsy life is over; and it is my aim to mingle amongst the citizens of the world without being shackled by my antecedents. It is true that I cannot alter the form of my countenance, nor convert this dark complexion of mine into one of milk and roses: true likewise that my features must ever bear the stamp peculiar to my race. But my mode of life, my pursuits, and my ideas *may* be changed. I shall settle therefore in a new world, where by means of my resources I may do good. Mine is a disposition that must ever be actively employed: but henceforth its energies shall always be directed to good and useful purposes. You will admit, Mary, that these intentions of mine can be better realized in another and far-off land."

"It gives me pleasure," I responded, "to hear you speak thus: and heaven knows that of all sincere wishes that may follow for your welfare, mine will be the sincerest."

"I am sure of it, Mary," replied Barbauld Azetha. "I depart under favourable circumstances. I have taken leave of my tribe: their tears were poured out when my intention was proclaimed—they testified their love for me by unmistakable demonstrations. But not the least satisfactory circumstance which I now contemplate on the eve of my departure, is your own prosperity in a worldly point of view. Most unfeignedly do I rejoice thereat. I knew you first as a humble servant-girl: I now visit you in your own superb mansion, situated on your

own domain. I beheld you surrounded with all the appliances of comfort—the refinements and the elegances of life. Once a servant yourself, you have now a host of domestics to do your bidding: you ride in your own carriage; and when you look forth from your window, your eye surveys your own fair estate. The noblest-hearted and the handsomest of men will become your husband: you will be happy, Mary—Oh, you will be happy! The prophecy which I once hazarded in the random ratiocination of my profession, will be amply fulfilled. I told you that you would have trials—that you would have troubles and ordeals—but that felicity would await you in the end. And I was right! I therefore go to another clime with my heart full of satisfaction and joy on your account.”

“I know, Barbauld,” I said, much affected by her words, “that you feel sincerely for me; and with equal sincerity do I thank you. But if you find me occupying a palatial home, I am not unduly elated by my position. Though the proud name of Clavering is appended to my own, I am still simple Mary Price to those who have known and loved me in my humbler days;—and if you behold numerous domestics beneath this roof, yet believe me, Barbauld, that I study my best to make their lot happy. Once a servant myself, I know that the veriest menial has feelings as sensitive as the most polished master or the most elegant mistress; and never would I wilfully wound the heart of even the humblest person in my service.”

“I have listened to you with pleasure, Mary,” answered Barbauld, “because it is good to hear you thus giving expression to your own generous sentiments; but the assurances your words conveyed were not necessary. I know that you could not conduct yourself otherwise than in the manner you have stated. But let me pass to another subject. Before I came hither, I visited the church where repose the remains of him whose name at one time I vowed never to breathe again. It was a little before the hour of sunset that, accompanied by the sexton, I entered that church: I bade him leave me—and kneeling by the tomb of Sir Aubrey Clavering, I prayed fervently. Darkness crept around me: it enveloped me quite—and still I remained there. The prayers to which I gave utterance have done me good: I feel that I have performed a duty,—for Sir Aubrey Clavering did his best to make atonement to me in his last moments. Perhaps I should have remained longer by his tomb—but the sexton, fearing that I might be ill, came and disturbed me. I issued forth—and then bent my steps hither. I must now bid you farewell.”

“But you will not take your departure so promptly?” I exclaimed. “Besides, it is now nine o’clock: at all events you will remain beneath my roof until the morrow?”

“Accept my grateful thanks for your kind offer, Mary—but I must sleep in Canterbury this night, so that I may take the earliest conveyance for London. Thence I shall proceed without delay to Liverpool, where, as I have learnt, a vessel will be ready to sail for the United States within a few hours after my arrival. My plans being arranged and my resolves adopted, I am anxious to put them into speedy execution. All other farewells are

bidden: the last that I had to say was to you—and I have journeyed hither for the express purpose. Believe me, dear Mary, it sends a bitter pang through my heart to have to breathe that word to you; and hence perhaps one motive for thus abridging my visit. Do not think it is less kindly meant on that account. Wherever I may be, and for the rest of my life, I shall never cease to think of you. I may write to you—Yes, I shall; and you will find leisure to answer me? I shall always be rejoiced to hear of your welfare; and well assured am I that henceforth you will have no unpleasant things to communicate. It is in no idle spirit that I venture this prophecy: it is the last that shall ever issue from my lips. But I do proclaim that you will be happy! Your virtues deserve to be thus recompensed: there would be no justice in heaven if it were otherwise. And now farewell.”

Barbauld Azetha embraced me affectionately; and I shed tears on thus parting from her. I saw that she also wiped her eyes as she hurried to the door: but the next moment she disappeared from my view. Then, as that door closed behind her, I could not help exclaiming aloud, “May heaven send you all possible happiness, Barbauld Azetha!”

The incident I am now about to relate, occurred two or three days after the one I have just chronicled. It was three o’clock in the afternoon; and I was just returning from a ride in the carriage, when as I alighted at the entrance of the Hall, I observed a short stout man, with a very red face, taking off his hat and making me the profoundest reverence. He was dressed in a wretchedly threadbare suit of black: his linen was not of the cleanest; and altogether his appearance bespoke the last struggle of genteel poverty to conceal as much as possible its abject condition. His hair was quite white: but there was nothing venerable in his look. On the contrary, his aspect was not calculated to speak in his favour. At the first glance methought his face was not unfamiliar to me: with a second glance the recognition was complete; and I was more amazed than shocked at the altered appearance of an individual whom I had known in circumstances evidently so very different. He did not recognise me; but kept on bowing with a cringing servility of which I should have thought him but little capable.

“Have I the honour,” he said, “of addressing Miss Clavering?”—and I must observe that I do not think he noticed the astonishment which his presence excited within me.

“That is my name,” I answered. “If you wish to speak to me, have the kindness to walk this way.”

I led him up into the drawing-room, where I requested him to be seated; and repairing to my bed-chamber, I put off my bonnet and shawl. I then returned to the apartment where I had left him; and the moment I entered, he rose from the chair which he had taken, and with fresh bows began to apologize for his intrusion. I had little sympathy for his fallen condition: nevertheless I spoke civilly enough, and desired him to be re-seated.

“Miss Clavering,” he went on to say, “if you will deign to listen to a tale of distress, I must crave your attention for a few minutes. You can render me a great service; and I have little doubt,

from all I have heard of the benevolence of your character——”

“Pray proceed, sir,” I interrupted him: “this preface is unnecessary.”

“I must begin by informing you, Miss Clavering,” he at once continued, “that for many years I was the incumbent of a lucrative rectory in one of the midland counties. My patron died: indeed his end was melancholy enough—it was that of self-destruction. I was indebted to him in a considerable sum of money: law proceedings were taken against me by his executor; and the result was the sequestration of my living. This executor, who is also the guardian of my noble patron’s son,—now a minor,—was anxious to induct a relative of his own into my rectory. Being completely in his power, I was forced into a compromise, according to the conditions of which I gave up that rectory, together with another living which I held, receiving a small sum of money, and a general discharge from my liabilities to the deceased nobleman’s estate. But when once the hand of adversity had begun to strike me, it smote with merciless severity, dealing blow upon blow. The failure of the county bank in which I lodged that sum of money, reduced me almost to destitution. I have a wife and large family to support. For a time I obtained a curacy: but my services being after a while no longer needed, I was once more thrown upon my resources. A letter from a friend informed me that a new church is about to be opened in Canterbury, the incumbency of which is in the gift of the Archdeacon of this diocese. In a few days the testimonials of the candidates are to be sent in: for as it is a subscription church, the selection of the incumbent is to be made in this manner. I have been recommended to obtain the signatures of as many influential personages in the city and its neighbourhood as I can possibly procure. This packet of papers”—and he produced one as he spoke—“contains the necessary evidences to corroborate the truth of my story. Pardon me, Miss Clavering, for having taken up your time so long: but if you would condescend to glance your eyes over these documents,—and if, having so done, you would still farther oblige me by giving me the advantage of your name,—you would confer a kindness that never would be forgotten. One word more, Miss Clavering. Here is a letter which I received only this morning from my wife. She is in London with our large family of children; and you will see that they are all reduced to the very verge of destitution. Perhaps the contents of this letter may serve as an additional inducement for you to help me in obtaining that clerical employment which will enable me to give bread to my family.”

“The noble patron of whom you have spoken,” I said, having listened with great attention to the narrative, and feeling my heart gradually softening towards the miserable man, until it melted altogether as the tears rolled down his cheeks when he spoke of the distressed state of his family,—“your noble patron was the late Lord Harlesdon.”

“True, Miss Clavering!” he exclaimed, with mingled joy and surprise on his countenance. “You know therefore that I have told you the truth!”

“I know,” was my answer,—and I endeavoured to conceal the emotions which the condition of his

wife and children had excited within me,—“that you are Dr. Vincent of Derbyshire.”

“That is my name,” he at once replied. “I beg ten thousand pardons for not announcing it at once; but my ideas are so bewildered with my reduced condition—the struggles I have gone through—the penury I have seen my wife and children endure——”

“Dr. Vincent,” I hastily said, “something shall be done on your behalf. But first let me ask you a few questions. When in the enjoyment of affluence and power, did you always enact the part of a true Christian minister? were you always charitable in the construction you put on the conduct of others? do you remember being one day with Lord Miltown when a certain Leonard Percival would not open you the gate? do you likewise recollect the injustice of which you were guilty towards a poor starving, houseless, wandering girl at Mr. Palmer’s? do you still farther recollect how you were the cause of that same unfriended creature being turned from Mrs. Hilton’s hospitable fire-side, into the winter’s cold?”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Dr. Vincent, now surveying me with earnest attention, and yet with bewilderment in his looks; “to whom—to whom am I speaking? Are not you Miss Clavering?”

“Yes—I am Miss Clavering,” I responded: “but perhaps no one in the world knows better than myself, how a certain Mary Price was treated by you at Mr. Palmer’s and at Mrs. Hilton’s. Did you ever subsequently hear that the aspersions you so readily and malevolently threw out against her were utterly unfounded?”

“Yes—I did afterwards learn that I had done her an injustice,” answered Dr. Vincent, with increasing trouble in his features and voice. “And now I bethink me, the more I look at you, Miss Clavering, I am convinced I have seen you before. Where was it? were you a guest at Harlesdon Park?—I do not recollect having seen you there—and yet you must have been—or else somewhere in Derbyshire at the time—to be so familiarly acquainted with all these things. Yes—assuredly I have had the honour of seeing you before.”

“I am that same Mary Price whom you so cruelly treated.”

At this announcement Dr. Vincent sat like one at whose feet a thunderbolt had burst. But in a few moments his amazement began to wear off; and it was easy to perceive what was passing in his mind. He thought that, after all, I was not Miss Clavering—but was probably her companion or her friend.

“Pray forgive me,” he said, “for the wrong I did you some years ago. It is evident that circumstances have altered with you. Doubtless you have much influence with Miss Clavering—I beseech you to use it on my behalf—and for heaven’s sake, mention not to that lady those evil antecedents of mine to which you have alluded. Pray, Miss Price, forgive me!” he again ejaculated with a voice and manner of abject entreaty.

One of my cards happened to be lying upon the table: I handed it to him—and he then read the words, “MISS PRICE CLAVERING.”

“Miss Clavering,” said Dr. Vincent, looking now thoroughly humbled and abashed in reality, so that there was no farther need for affected servility,—“I am so ashamed of myself, I know not

what to say. If I had thought it possible that in you I should meet—But no matter! I throw myself upon your mercy—”

“Enough, Dr. Vincent—I have forgiven you. In the first place permit me to offer you this little succour on behalf of your family:”—and I placed a bank-note for fifty pounds in his hands. The tears ran down his cheeks—his lips quivered—he could not give utterance to a syllable: but he sobbed aloud. I felt convinced that adversity with its chastening hand had much altered him: but still I hesitated to sign his recommendation for the incumbency, as I knew what a serious step it was. But still I did not like to refuse. He seemed to understand what was passing in my mind; and wiping away his tears, assured me in the most earnest manner that he had passed through so many misfortunes, had seen so much misery, and had experienced so many bitter privations, that whatsoever might have been previously insolent and overbearing in his disposition, had become completely subdued. I listened to him with attention: I studied his countenance to convince myself that his words were spoken with sincerity; and the result being favourable to himself, I no longer hesitated to append my name to the requisite document. And this I was the better able to do, and all the more conscientiously, inasmuch as it was a mere personal recommendation, and not a positive and specific testimonial. He thanked me with tears in his eyes: I rang the bell and ordered up refreshments, so that he might be convinced I had entirely and altogether forgiven him for his cruel treatment towards me in times past. He took his leave with renewed expressions of thankfulness—assuring me that even if his own sufferings had not worked a beneficial influence upon him, the lesson of Christian forgiveness and true benevolence which I had this day taught him would have had that effect.

A week afterwards Dr. Vincent called again at Clavering Hall. He was now dressed in a decent suit of black—wore clean linen—and had a respectable appearance. Mingled joy and gratitude were expressed in his countenance as he was introduced to the room where I received him. He had been successful in his application for the living; and he assured me that it was entirely through the presence of my name to his recommendatory paper, which had achieved this success; for that at every house where he had subsequently called, the signature of its occupant was readily given, on its being seen that mine was there. He showed me a letter he had received from his wife, acknowledging the receipt of forty pounds out of the fifty which I had given him; and the poor lady spoke of my bounty in terms of such heartfelt gratitude as to bring tears from my eyes. Dr. Vincent then produced two other letters, which he requested me to read. One was from Mr. Palmer, to whom he had written immediately after his first interview with me, and to whom he had communicated all that had taken place. Mr. Palmer, in his reply, informed Dr. Vincent how kind I had been to him in Paris when he lost his unfortunate daughter; and he expressed his gratification to hear that circumstances had so materially changed my position in life. The other letter which Dr. Vincent showed me, was from Mrs. Hilton. This worthy lady desired to be most affectionately remembered to me; and

begged Dr. Vincent to give me the sincere assurance that she had never ceased to regret her harsh treatment towards me from the moment that she discovered, by a letter written when I was at Mrs. Calder's (now Countess of Chilstone), that I was innocent of the charges imputed to me.

I was well pleased to see Dr. Vincent had so promptly communicated with Mr. Palmer and Mrs. Hilton in respect to myself: it was a proof of those better feelings which he assured me had taken possession of his heart; and I was now unfeignedly glad that I had signed his recommendatory paper. I inquired whether he meant to have his family at once sent for, to take up their abode in Canterbury?—and he answered in the affirmative. I then, in as delicate a manner as possible, hinted that as this removal would be attended with considerable expense, I must beg him to accept a farther sum of fifty pounds to succour him therein. At first he positively declined to encroach any farther upon my bounty: but I forced the money upon him; and he went away a still happier, and I firmly believe a still better man.

A few days later he called in company with Mrs. Vincent, who was most anxious to express her gratitude in person for the immense services I had rendered her husband and his family, and to assure me that they were now all comfortably located in the parsonage-house attached to the new church.

On the same day that I received this visit from Dr. and Mrs. Vincent, I learnt the result of the application to the celebrated German oculist. Dr. Parkinson called to inform me that Hermann Wertheim would visit England and devote his professional services in the case specified, for the sum of three hundred guineas; that he would perform an operation, if needed; and would moreover remain a week or ten days to watch the result. He added that on the receipt of a letter acquiescing in these terms, he would start off at once, in which case he would be with Dr. Parkinson in Canterbury on a particular day. I immediately requested Dr. Parkinson to write back and consent to the proposal made; and it was farther arranged that the worthy physician should in the interval previous to Dr. Wertheim's arrival, communicate to Mrs. Craven the steps that were being taken on her daughter's behalf.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE OPERATION.

Two or three days after the incidents just related, I learnt from Dr. Parkinson that he had spoken to Mrs. Craven; and that this lady purposed to pay me a visit, to express personally the gratitude she felt for my kindness, and at the same time to make a certain request, which indeed amounted to the only condition whereon she could consent to avail herself of my benevolent purpose on her daughter's behalf. What this request was, Dr. Parkinson did not know; and we were both at a loss to surmise. I was not however kept very long in suspense. It was noon when the physician called—it was about three o'clock when Mrs. Craven arrived at the Hall. She came alone; and I also received her alone—for the physician had taken his departure.

"Miss Clavering," said Mrs. Craven, taking both my hands and pressing them warmly, while her voice was tremulous with emotions, and tears stood in her eyes, "I have not words wherewith to express all that I feel towards you. Such an amount of kindness from even a near relation or long-known friend, would confer an immensity of obligation beyond the power of language to acknowledge, and utterly beyond my means to repay. But when coming from one who until the other day was even ignorant of the existence of such persons as those who are now the objects of so much noble generosity——"

Here she stopped short, unable to complete the sentence in words; but it was still more eloquently perfected by her looks and her tears.

"I came to you alone," she went on to say after a long pause, "inasmuch as I will not break to my daughter until the last moment the ordeal through which she may have to pass. Dr. Parkinson himself has recommended that this silence should be observed until the eve of the great experiment which, God grant, may restore my beloved child to the blessing of sight! You can well understand, my dear Miss Clavering, that it will be far better to avoid exciting her mind until the last moment. But this is not the only reason for which I have come alone. I have to make a request; and though it may assume the aspect of a condition which I lay down, I beseech and implore you not to judge me harshly on that account—nor to fancy for a single moment that I am capable of showing an ungrateful return for your unparalleled kindness."

"Proceed, Mrs. Craven," I said: "for I am well assured that you have your own good reasons for whatsoever you are about to stipulate."

"My request is simple," she responded, "and may be explained in a few words. It is only this:—that when the operation takes place, if an operation there be, no one may be present save those immediately interested in the proceeding. I mean that you will ask no relation nor friend to witness it—that my daughter and myself, you and Dr. Parkinson, together with the German oculist, may comprise the entire party."

"This request is so perfectly consistent with every feeling of delicacy," I at once answered, "that it only expresses the course which I myself should have proposed."

"Thank you, Miss Clavering,—thank you for the assurance you have just given me!"—and again did Mrs. Craven press my hands warmly.

"Dr. Parkinson has proposed," I said, "that if there be an operation it should take place beneath this roof. It may be necessary for the patient to enjoy the utmost quiet and the completest tranquillity for some days following. His own house cannot be made available for the purpose, inasmuch as he has several young children there; and your own dwelling is too near to others where there are likewise families. If therefore, Mrs. Craven," I added, somewhat hesitatingly, remembering how decisively and curtly my former invitation had been refused, "you and your daughter will honour me with your presence for a few days at the Hall, when Dr. Wertheim shall have arrived——"

"Miss Clavering, that one request being granted," Mrs. Craven hastened to interrupt me, "Isabella

and myself are entirely in your hands. Do not think that when the other day I refused your courteous invitation—I should say *kind*, for it was far more than courteous—I was actuated by any save the best of motives. Yes—we will come: Isabella and myself will feel happy in partaking of your hospitality."

After some more conversation, Mrs. Craven departed; and nothing of any consequence occurred for the next ten days—at the expiration of which interval Dr. Hermann Wertheim arrived at Canterbury. He took up his abode, according to a previous understanding between myself and Dr. Parkinson, at this gentleman's house; and on the same day he paid a visit to his fair patient. This was merely a preliminary one—and yet it was all-important: for on his opinion now hung the hope which was entertained that Isabella Craven might yet be restored to sight. It was only within a few hours of Dr. Wertheim's visit, that Isabella had been informed of what was being done on her behalf; and *she* now also cherished the fond hope that she might yet see! I was not present at that first meeting between the eminent German oculist and his patient; but from what I afterwards learnt, it was fraught with a profound suspense—almost a frightful one—for the mother and the daughter. Fortunately Dr. Wertheim spoke the English language with tolerable accuracy, while he understood it perfectly. He heard from Mrs. Craven's lips a detailed narrative of all the particulars attendant on Isabella's loss of vision—the various opinions she had received from the English oculists—in short all that had been done in the hope of restoring the afflicted young creature to the use of her vision. He then examined her eyes; and at length the word was spoken which was to annihilate suspense, and either confirm the enthusiasm of hope or deal the death-blow of disappointment. But that word was favourable! Hermann Wertheim had no doubt as to the result; and he confidently predicted that sight could be restored. An operation was however necessary; and it was agreed that this should be accomplished at Clavering Hall on the ensuing day.

Dr. Wertheim returned to the English physician's house: a messenger was at once despatched with a note to me, announcing the favourable report which the celebrated oculist had made; and I accordingly sent off the carriage to fetch Mrs. Craven and her daughter. They arrived to dinner; and thus were they now the inmates of that mansion which but a short time back the mother had so pointedly refused to visit. I need hardly say that Isabella poured forth her gratitude in the most fervid, but at the same time touching manner, for the great kindness and the noble generosity—as she was pleased to denominate my conduct—which I had shown in her behalf; and I assured her that it would afford me the utmost happiness to behold a successful result. Throughout all that evening Isabella's feelings were in the flutter of newly-excited hope: but at the same time she frequently declared that if the experiment were to fail, she should still be enabled to relapse into that state of placid resignation from which she was now as it were drawn away. Full well did I understand the nature of those feelings which the poor girl must have experienced. For four long years



had she been, so far as the power of vision was concerned, unaffected by times or seasons. Whether the sun shone, or it was deep midnight, 'twas in respect to that lost sense all the same to her: she might catch upon her countenance the beams of the orb of day—she might feel his warmth—but his glory she could not behold. She might inhale the fragrance of sweet flowers—but their loveliness was as naught to her: memory alone, but not present experience, could tell her how beautiful they were. For four long years she had moved about in total darkness—a patient sufferer, it was true,—but not the less a sufferer. She had heard human voices, but had seen not the faces of those who spoke: the entire world had been shut out from her view. And now!—Oh! now, that there was the thrilling joyous hope of again beholding everything before which a deep black veil had for those long years hung—now that there was the fond expectation of having that veil lifted, and the

darkness of night turned once more into the glory of day—it was indeed enough to make her heart flutter and to excite ineffable emotions.

The day—the eventful day dawned; and when I rose from my couch I wondered to myself how it would finish for Isabella Craven. As I looked forth from my window, and beheld the sun shining through the bright frosty air—and the evergreens displaying their emerald verdure in the garden—and the conservatories filled with an infinite variety of beautiful plants, I said inwardly, “Will the power of beholding *these* be restored to Isabella Craven ere that sun shall sink into his western home?”

I feared lest the excitement which she might naturally be supposed to feel, would to some extent operate against the success of the ordeal through which she was to pass: but when I joined my guests at the breakfast-table, I was rejoiced to find that Isabella had armed herself with a degree of

fortitude which enabled her to maintain a greater degree of serenity than she had shown on the previous evening. The looks which her mother and myself exchanged, were as much as to imply, "This is the day!"—and I saw that Mrs. Craven was full of hope.

The hour fixed for the arrival of the two physicians was three o'clock; and during the interval both Mrs. Craven and myself did our best to keep Isabella's mind continuously occupied. We went out for a long ride in the carriage; and we conversed with her the whole time. On our return to the Hall, we visited the conservatories, where she might inhale the fragrance of those flowers which in a short time it was our hope that she would be enabled to see: and thus we whiled away hour after hour until three o'clock. Then we repaired to the drawing-room; and in a few minutes Dr. Parkinson and Dr. Wertheim were introduced.

The German oculist was a man of about forty years of age. He was tall—largely and somewhat awkwardly formed; he had a certain stoop in his gait, which seemed as if it had been acquired by constantly bending over the books which he had studied, the experiments which he had made, and the operations he had performed. His manners, though sufficiently polite, could not be denominated prepossessing: they were cold and reserved rather than otherwise: his discourse was terse and phlegmatic—but it was evident that he was a man of the strongest nerve and the fullest self-possession. But little was said ere the preliminaries were commenced; and these were brief enough. The curtains were drawn closely over all the windows except one in that spacious apartment: a large easy-chair was placed in the middle of the room; and in this Isabella Craven was seated. Dr. Wertheim drew forth a small case of instruments, which he opened noiselessly, so that his patient might not know what he was doing at the instant: but she intuitively divined—and her pale countenance indicated the trembling suspense of the soul, but not the apprehension of physical pain. Dr. Parkinson stood by with that calm composure which characterizes professional men: while Mrs. Craven and myself gazed in profound silence and with the acutest interest on all that was passing. Dr. Wertheim now spoke a few words to cheer and encourage his youthful patient: and I was astonished as well as delighted and affected, at the exceeding kindness which he now threw into his accents and his language. At the same time a light kindled in his eyes, as if he felt that he was standing on the threshold of another grand triumph of that skill which had made his name so famous, and which though exercised for a golden reward, was nevertheless in itself a benevolence of which man was made the agent on behalf of heaven.

A cold tremor swept through me as I saw Dr. Wertheim take up a particular instrument from his case: it was but a small one, and appeared as sharp as a needle. The next moment he touched one of Isabella's eyes: she preserved a remarkable degree of fortitude—but her mother turned away, half-clinging to my arm, unable to endure the spectacle, and seeming as if she were about to faint. Nor could I contemplate it any farther: but in a few seconds more it was all over; and Dr. Wertheim asked, in a voice which

showed that his heart was not without its feelings of benevolence, "Miss Craven, do you see?"

Then was the glorious triumph of that great man's art instantaneously proclaimed by the rapturous response, "Thank God, I see!"

Never shall I forget the joy which thrilled through me—Oh, so different from that cold tremor which I had experienced but two minutes back!—and Mrs. Craven, bursting into tears, sank down upon her knees and sobbed in very ecstacy. Dr. Parkinson seized me by the hand—pressed it warmly—and whispered in a low but fervent tone, "To you, Miss Clavering, is all this due!" I felt the tears trickling down my cheeks: my soul revelled in the luxury of the consciousness of a good deed performed;—and now I experienced all the sweet delight which riches, properly dispensed, can so truly afford.

No sooner had Dr. Parkinson addressed me in those few but feeling words, when he turned abruptly aside; and hurrying to that window the curtains of which had been kept drawn back, he closed those draperies: for it was requisite the light should only be admitted by degrees, so that the restored faculty of vision might be gradually accustomed to its refulgent blaze. Dr. Wertheim received the thanks, most fervidly expressed, of all present; and nothing could exceed the grateful affection with which Mrs. Craven and Isabella expressed themselves towards me. For the remainder of the day Isabella stayed in that darkened room,—her mother and myself continuing with her; and though she spoke but little, in order not to excite herself, it was easy to perceive that her heart was full of ineffable emotions. One question I whisperingly put to Dr. Wertheim before he took his leave with the Canterbury physician in the evening—for they remained to dinner at the Hall;—and this was, whether his patient's eyes would exhibit any marks of the operation which had been performed? He assured me that there was not the slightest apprehension thereof; and this response I communicated to Mrs. Craven, who duly imparted it to her daughter. Before I retired to rest that night, I wrote a letter to Eustace, and another to William,—to tell them all that had taken place: for this was the first time I had mentioned anything about the Cravens in my correspondence with either of them. My heart was now so full of joy at the result of the operation, that I could not refrain from giving it that vent,—although I knew full well that the letters, when posted on the following day, would not leave Canterbury till the evening, and would not be delivered in London until the ensuing morning.

Soon after breakfast on the day after the operation, the Canterbury physician and Dr. Wertheim made their appearance at the Hall; and the latter reported most satisfactorily as to the condition of his patient's improving vision—a fact which she herself was enabled to corroborate when the light was faintly and cautiously admitted into the apartment. Dr. Wertheim declared that there was absolutely no need for him to remain in England any longer—that Dr. Parkinson fully understood how to continue the treatment of the case—and that if he were not thus positive in respect to it, he would not think of hurrying his departure. We were rejoiced rather than otherwise at these

announcements, inasmuch as they proved how complete was the cure, and how certain was Isabella's progress towards the enjoyment of a clear and unobstructed vision. I presented him with a cheque for six hundred guineas, according to my promise that if the operation were successful the fee which he had demanded should be doubled; and I was proportionately liberal in the remuneration which I bestowed upon the English physician. Dr. Wertheim bade us farewell—and went away, followed by the heartfelt gratitude of those whom he left behind.

It was about three o'clock on this same day of which I am now writing—namely, the one after the operation,—and Isabella was reclining on a sofa in the drawing-room. Mrs. Craven and myself were with her. She had a bandage upon the eyes; and all the windows had the curtains drawn over them. According to a promise made in the morning, Dr. Parkinson now paid another visit: for according to the instructions which the German oculist had left behind him, the light was again to be admitted somewhat, and for a longer period than it was in the forenoon, upon Isabella's eyes. The bandage was removed—the curtains were drawn back from the window fronting the sofa where the patient lay: but the Venetian shutters remained closed outside. At this moment the door of the drawing-room was opened; and Isabella, instinctively turning her eyes in that direction, exclaimed, the instant she caught sight of the individual who entered, "It is he!"—and she fainted in her mother's arms.

But what words can express my astonishment when the truth was thus suddenly revealed to me?—for it was my own brother William who had so abruptly and unexpectedly made his appearance!

CHAPTER CLXVII.

MY BROTHER AT THE HALL.

DR. PARKINSON at once comprehended the truth likewise; and knowing (as he afterwards told me) that this was my brother by the likeness which existed between us, he bade me hasten away with him to another room,—in the same hurried terms assuring me that there was no serious cause for apprehension on Isabella's behalf. I accordingly advanced towards William, who was standing in astonishment at the spectacle which he beheld; and we issued from the apartment together. Proceeding to an adjacent one, we embraced each other affectionately; and now I saw by William's looks that he had something of grave importance to communicate. He noticed the sudden suspense which had fastened itself upon me; and hastening to relieve me from it, he said, "Dear Mary, I have come to announce to you that Lord Wilberton is no more."

"What!" I exclaimed, terribly shocked at this intelligence: "one so young——"

"Yes, Mary—it is but too true. Ferdinand is no more—and Eustace is now Lord Wilberton."

I burst into tears: for it was not only a dreadful thing to learn the sudden death of a fellow-creature—but I likewise felt deeply on Eustace's account; as I knew that having generously forgotten and

forgiven all his brother's former ill-treatment, he must be cruelly distressed at this loss.

"It happened last evening," said William, after a pause,—*"too late to write to you by post."* Lord Wilberton met his death by an accident: he was thrown from his horse in Hyde Park—his skull was fractured—and death must have been instantaneous. Eustace, knowing what you would feel if you received the intelligence abruptly, sent for me the first thing this morning; and requested me to travel post, without delay, and bring you the tidings. I did so. Pardon me, dear Mary, if in my anxiety to embrace you I burst somewhat abruptly upon a scene on which I now feel that my presence must have been an unjustifiable intrusion."

"Do not speak thus, my dear brother!" I said: "how could you possibly intrude anywhere beneath your own sister's roof? Nevertheless, it was perhaps unfortunate——But you do not know what I have learnt——Those ladies are old acquaintances of yours."

"Yes—I recognized them immediately," answered William: "they are Mrs. and Miss Craven. I knew them at Deal: Mr. Sands attended upon Miss Craven—and I visited them occasionally."

"Did you not hear that ejaculation which burst from Isabella's lips?" I asked.

"I did—and was struck with astonishment," responded my brother. "The scene itself I instantaneously understood: an operation has been performed, and Miss Craven has recovered her sight. I am rejoiced at it—and I can likewise divine by her presence here that you, my dear Mary, have generously interested yourself on her behalf."

I explained to William the circumstances under which I had formed the acquaintance of Mrs. and Miss Craven,—how I had compassionated the afflicted young lady—and how, through the medium of Dr. Parkinson, I had invited Dr. Hermann Wertheim over to England to perform an operation: but from motives of delicacy I of course said nothing in respect to the romantic affection which Isabella had formed for my brother.

"You have accomplished a noble deed, Mary," he observed, having listened with deep interest to my narrative: "and wealth could not have fallen into better hands than your's. But how could Miss Craven have possibly known who I was? And yet she did—it was evident enough!"

William looked perfectly bewildered; but yet, as I subsequently learnt, he was very far from entertaining even the remotest suspicion as to the real truth. I knew not precisely what to do: for I could not possibly acquaint him with the actual circumstances of the case without Mrs. Craven's permission.

"Remain here, William," I said, as a thought struck me: "and I will just hasten back to the drawing-room and see how Miss Craven now is."

I accordingly returned to that apartment; and found Isabella restored to consciousness. But the bandage was again over her eyes: for Dr. Parkinson feared that the admission of light after the excitement she had just gone through, might be prejudicial. Mrs. Craven at once accosted me; and said in a hurried whisper, "Dear Miss Clavering, let me speak to you alone."

I led the way to another apartment; and when

we were there together, she took my hand, and with mournful seriousness said, "You at length comprehend everything! A few hurried words which Dr. Parkinson spoke to me just now, while Isabella was still in a state of unconsciousness, have made me aware that you are no stranger to the romantic love she formed for your brother: and Dr. Parkinson was right to give you those explanations. You will now understand several points in my own conduct which may have appeared, at the time, not merely singular—but even rude and discourteous. When your brother visited us at Deal, he frequently spoke in the fondest and most enthusiastic terms of his sister Mary. Your name therefore was familiar to us; and when we recently heard that a certain Miss Mary Price had inherited the domain of the late Sir Aubrey Clavering, we knew full well that it was you. Conceive therefore my astonishment when on the day that I invited you to enter my house, you announced yourself to be Miss Clavering. Now also you can understand wherefore I so hurriedly left you on that occasion, to anticipate the presence of my daughter, and inform her who was beneath my roof. I was in hopes that she would not ask to meet you. I feared lest your presence might revive with renewed power those associations which had caused my poor girl so much unhappiness. But she begged that she might be permitted to meet you—Ah! Miss Clavering, you can doubtless comprehend the interest which Isabella felt with regard to the sister of him whom she so romantically loved. She promised to control her feelings; and therefore I yielded to her wishes. You did meet—and I saw how the sound of your voice, resembling in its feminine melody the voice of your brother, thrilled through my poor daughter's heart. When you invited us to visit you at your own dwelling, I was compelled to refuse somewhat decisively: for I knew not then but that your brother might be residing with you, or that he might be a frequent visitor. Nor did I press you to repeat your own visit to my humble abode,—apprehensive lest Isabella's feelings might betray themselves. Then again, on Dr. Parkinson's communicating to me your nobly generous intentions on Isabella's behalf, I elicited from him the fact that you dwelt alone here, and that you had none of your relations remaining with you, nor even visiting you. The conditions I imposed on the day that I called upon you here, must now likewise be intelligible to you. Thinking that as your brother was studying for the medical profession, he would naturally feel interested in an operation to be performed by so celebrated a man as Dr. Wertheim, I feared lest you should invite him to be present; and hence my stipulation that every one should be excluded save those immediately interested in the proceeding. Now, my dear Miss Clavering, you will give me credit for having been actuated in all I did by the utmost delicacy of feeling."

"Never did I think otherwise, my dear Mrs. Craven," I said, returning the warm pressure of her hand; "even when I was at a loss to comprehend your motives. I have not mentioned to my brother the romantic circumstances to which you have alluded: I thought that I would consult with you first of all—and with this object I quitted him upon some excuse."

"Not for worlds, my dear Miss Clavering," exclaimed Isabella's mother, "would I have you enter into such explanations with your brother! His own delicacy of feeling would be shocked——"

"Not so, my dear madam," I interrupted her: "he is too generous, as well as too intelligent—he would pity your daughter if he could not love her: he would not think the worse of her!"—then, after a pause, I observed, "But it is impossible for any one to know Isabella without loving her!"

"Nevertheless, I repeat, my dear young friend," answered Mrs. Craven, "that I would not for worlds have Mr. Price made acquainted with what might appear my daughter's romantic folly! Of course your brother is come to stay with you: and it would be the height of indiscretion and imprudence for Isabella to remain any longer beneath your roof. She is well enough to be removed this evening——"

"Mrs. Craven," I exclaimed firmly, and almost indignantly, "I could not think of allowing such a thing. What! to risk the undoing of all that has been done? No—it is impossible! Do not weep, my dear madam," I continued, taking her hand: for the tears were running down her cheeks: "I know that you must feel the embarrassment of the situation: but you will permit me to offer my own suggestions. You must remain here until the blessing of sight be entirely assured to your daughter. If you decide upon not seeing my brother, the Hall is spacious enough for you to dwell thus apart. But I would that it were otherwise. William shall remain in ignorance of those circumstances which you do not wish to be explained to him; and Miss Craven, as a well-educated and right-minded young lady—embued likewise with the most delicate and proper feelings—will know how to deport herself in my brother's presence. Now, do not misunderstand me, Mrs. Craven. I repeat what I ere now said—that it is impossible to know Isabella without loving her; and William will learn to love her. Yes, I am assured of it!—and nothing would afford me greater pleasure than to witness the day which should give him such an amiable and excellent young lady as his wife."

"Miss Clavering," said Mrs. Craven, again pressing my hand affectionately, "you possess the most generous of hearts. You know that my daughter is portionless——"

"Oh! my dear madam, do not suffer such purely worldly considerations to intervene where the best and holiest sentiments of the soul are concerned. I beseech you to be guided by me in the present instance."

"But, my dear Miss Clavering," responded Mrs. Craven, not knowing how to act, and much affected as well as bewildered,—“have you well weighed the consequences of the course which you suggest? Do you not comprehend that poor Isabella entertains for your brother the same affection as at first? did you not hear that thrilling ejaculation which burst from her lips as he entered the room? She recognised him immediately: it was her heart's ideal that was thus suddenly realized. Of you she had only obtained so partial a glimpse when the bandage was removed this morning, that it could scarcely be on account of the resemblance between yourself and

your brother she thus recognised the latter. No—it was because in my thoughtless folly, when at Deal, I had described to her the exact portraiture of William Price: then her imagination depicted the model according to her own estimate of all that is perfect in manly beauty;—and everything she thus fancied was fortuitously consistent with actual facts. And then too, there was that intuitive prompting which is so keen on the part of those who, being deprived of sight, have to rely so much on the increased power of their other faculties—Yes, it was thus that she recognised him at once! You see therefore that she loves him; and you propose that they shall be thrown together. That Isabella will veil her own feelings beneath a becoming modesty, I am well assured: out all the while the love which she cherishes will become more firmly established, if possible—more completely interwoven with the principles of her own existence. What, then, if your brother should fail to reciprocate that affection? what if he should experience a mere friendship, but continue indifferent as to love? My daughter's unhappiness would be sealed—I shudder when I contemplate the eventuality!"

"My dear Mrs. Craven," I answered, having listened to her with the utmost interest and attention, "I do not share your apprehensions. Believe me, if I feared the result, I would not for a single moment recommend a course which might lead to so much unhappiness in respect to Isabella, for whom I entertain the sincerest friendship and love. No—believe me, I would not! But there is something within me that renders me confident as to the result: and I repeat that one of the happiest days of my life would be that on which I should welcome your daughter as a sister-in-law. I conjure you, therefore, to let me have my own way in this; and you will not repent it!"

"My dearest young friend," answered Mrs. Craven, "I am already so deeply indebted to you, and I have such confidence in your judgment and foresight, that I know not how to refuse concurrence with your wishes. Be it therefore as you say: but postpone the first meeting of your brother and Isabella until the morrow."

"That was my intention," I answered: and our conference then broke up,—Mrs. Craven returning to the room where she had left her daughter with Dr. Parkinson, and I going back to the apartment in which William awaited me.

In order to divert his attention as much as possible from the incident of his sudden recognition by Isabella Craven and the ejaculation which had burst from her lips, I at once began talking again of the death of Eustace's brother; and presently I said, "My dear William, now that you are once here, you must contrive to pass at least a month or six weeks. You have been studying hard, and have taken no holiday: I hope therefore that you will comply with my request."

My brother acceded to the proposal; and as there was yet an hour to dinner, I took him over the Hall. He was much pleased with the elegance of the place: but when we visited the picture-gallery, the contemplation of the portrait of Sir Wyndham Clavering inspired him with the same touching and solemn associations which it never failed to arouse in me. He also was struck, as if

with a painful impression, by the portrait of Lady Clavering: for there was something of a fearful beauty in those features—and she indeed appeared to be a woman who could have done all we knew belonged to her private history. It was evident, though we had never seen her, that the artist must have preserved all the traits of the original with the most life-like accuracy: for there are portraits of that kind which the instant they are gazed upon strike the beholder as being of necessity perfect resemblances.

That night, before I retired to rest, I penned a long letter to Eustace, condoling with him for the loss of his brother, and thanking him most kindly for his forethought in sending William to save me from receiving the intelligence with the abruptness of a shock. When I had folded and sealed the letter, and addressed it to Eustace as *Lord Wilberton*, I could not help reflecting on the instability and vicissitudes of human affairs. It was not so very long ago that there were two persons between himself and the title—his father and his brother; and as it might be reasonably supposed that the latter would marry, it seemed but little within the range of probability that Eustace would ever find himself at the head of the noble house to which he belonged. And it was only a few months back that he was a ruined young man—the inmate of a debtor's prison—unable even to obtain the requisite sum of money to emancipate himself for the purpose of attending his mother's funeral; and now an accident had suddenly put him in possession of great riches. Nor less did I reflect that when the time should come for him to lead me to the altar, it would be to make me the sharer of his own high rank; and I who but a comparatively short time back was a humble servant girl, was destined to that elevation. As I sat in my chamber, making all these reflections ere I retired to rest, I could not help reviewing many incidents of my past life. I thought of the bitter poverty to which I and Jane were at one time reduced, when we first went to Deal—and how our very wearing apparel was pledged to procure us sustenance. Now I was the possessor of a fine estate, a noble mansion, and a large income; and I was enabled to make use of my wealth for the benefit of others. Truly all these were solemn and at the same time deeply affecting subjects for meditation; and I remember that more than ever on that particular night did I resolve some day to undertake the task of committing my memoirs to paper and giving them to the world, that they might prove as useful and instructive as they were likely to be amusing.

On the following day William and Isabella met. On his part it was nothing more than the renewal of an acquaintance previously formed: but on her side there was the necessity of exercising a certain control over her feelings. This she did in a manner fully becoming the delicacy of the sex, and her own sense of propriety especially. Mrs. Craven, who from the very first had taken a liking to William, shook him cordially by the hand; and in the course of the morning he likewise formed the acquaintance of Dr. Parkinson. Several days passed—and each one was characterized by a steady improvement in Isabella's power of vision: each day therefore could she endure a stronger light, and likewise for a greater length of time. There was not the remotest danger of any relapse;

and as Dr. Parkinson had been instructed by Hermann Wertheim to watch certain symptoms, that he might judge and act accordingly, he was enabled to pronounce that not the slightest apprehension need be entertained that at any future period of her life her power of vision would be obscured again. The cause of the obstruction had been removed once for all; and at the expiration of a week or ten days, the slight blood-shot marks which had remained in the whites of the eyes after the operation, disappeared, leaving those whites as free from blemish and of a clearness as pellucid as they ever were.

At the expiration of those ten days Mrs. Craven intimated to me that it would now be better for herself and daughter to return to their own abode; but to this I would not listen. Indeed I had already some reason to suppose that my brother William was not insensible to the beauty and the amiability of Isabella Craven. Now that she enjoyed the blessing of sight, there was no longer that air of vacancy in her looks—nothing, in short, to mar the effect of her sweet and touching beauty. Her spirits too had rallied: she was now enabled to gaze upon the countenances of those whose voices she heard;—and though the season was fast hastening towards winter, yet nature had still ineffable charms for one who for four years had been shut out from their contemplation. The evergreens in the garden and shrubbery—the flowers in the conservatories—the green fields—the stately trees in the park—the frisking deer—the very clouds of heaven themselves as they floated athwart the sky, were objects of interest for her. Being thus restored to the power of enjoying the blessing of sight, and rescued from the necessity of groping her way in darkness through the world, it was no wonder that her spirits should become elevated—that the tints of the rose should deepen upon her cheeks—and that the tones of her voice should not be confined to the silvery flow of language, but should ring forth occasionally in a merry laugh. And then, too, she was dwelling beneath the same roof with him whom she loved: he was her frequent companion in rambles through the grounds:—and so pure, so chaste, so holy was her affection, that it was sufficient to be thus near its object to absorb all interest in the present, and leave no scope for a thought of the future. Mrs. Craven consented to remain at the Hall: indeed it was only from a delicate fear of intruding on my hospitality that she had suggested the propriety of departure;—and thus days grew into weeks, until two months had elapsed since the arrival of William.

During this interval—especially at the latter portion of it—I saw enough to convince me that my calculations would be justified, and that Isabella Craven was destined for my brother's wife. If I had not been perfectly well convinced of the excellence of her principles, the goodness of her heart, and the sweetness of her temper, I should never for a moment have thought of furnishing the opportunities for William to become enamoured of her. But her's was one of those characters that are soon read: it was as easy to distinguish the thorough artlessness of her mind as the pebbly bed at the bottom of a crystal stream. Occasionally, when William and I were alone together, he would speak to me in high

terms of Miss Craven; and on each occasion it was with an increased enthusiasm. At the expiration of the two months he expressed to me his desire of returning to London to resume his medical studies; and yet methought—indeed I was convinced—that there was a mournfulness in his tone and a shade of melancholy upon his features. I urged him to remain one month more,—representing that he might allow himself this little extra holiday, and that he could make up for the lost time on his return to London. He consented: and I then sought Mrs. Craven and insisted that she and her daughter should likewise stay another month at the Hall.

The month passed; and day by day, during the interval, did I observe that William's attachment for Isabella was becoming more deeply rooted. At length the eve of his departure arrived; and I saw that he was nervous, restless, and unhappy. He sought an opportunity of being alone with me; and with some degree of confusion, he said, "My dear sister, I wish to speak to you on a very important subject."

"Proceed, William," I said, not altogether able to repress a smile, which he immediately perceived.

"Is it possible you understand my meaning?" he exclaimed, catching with eagerness at the hope of being saved the necessity of explanations: "and do you approve—?"

"My dear William," I answered, "you love an amiable and excellent girl: how can I do otherwise than approve of your choice?"

"Oh, Mary!" he cried, joy and gratitude beaming on his countenance; "how happy you have made me by what you have just said! Is it not astonishing how a few brief words can effect such a change in the state of the feelings? I sought this interview with apprehension in my soul: I knew not what you might say! But I had resolved to do nothing contrary to your will. No, my dear Mary—not for the world would I act in anything important without your counsel or concurrence! Not merely as my elder sister, but also by your own admirable conduct and noble example, do you deserve that I should pay this homage to your judgment and your wishes."

"Then rest satisfied, my dear brother," I answered, embracing him, "that it will be a happy day for me on which I shall behold you the husband of Isabella Craven. And now I will tell you a great secret: for I am sure that even if I were not to reveal it, the amiable and artless Isabella would make you acquainted with it when once she stood on that familiar footing with you as to be your intended bride."

"Then you do not think, Mary," exclaimed William, renewed joy dancing in his eyes, "that there is any danger of my experiencing a refusal?"

"Danger, my dear brother?" I exclaimed. "No! for the secret I have to reveal to you, is nothing more nor less than this—that for the last two years has Isabella loved you."

"Oh! Mary, is this possible? But yes—I know it is: for you never speak an untruth even in jest—Oh! is it possible?"

"Have you forgotten, William, that ejaculation which burst from Isabella's lips when she recognised you at the first moment of your arrival?"

"No—I have not forgotten it," he answered: "indeed, I have often thought of it—I have bewildered myself with conjectures! Often too have I been on the point of seeking an explanation from you: but I did not like to revive the subject. Ah! I understand it now—and Isabella loves me!"

I proceeded to inform my brother of all those details which I had learnt from Dr. Parkinson's lips, and which had been subsequently corroborated by Mrs. Craven herself, in respect to Isabella's romantic love. William listened with rapture; and when I had concluded, he thanked me with tears in his eyes for having made him a revelation which banished suspense and confirmed all his hopes.

"You are about to depart for the renewal of your studies, William," I said; "and under these circumstances it will be well for you to avow your affection to Isabella Craven—and as a matter of respect towards her mother, solicit that lady's consent."

"But I was thinking, Mary," answered William, as a shade of melancholy came over his countenance, "that but a few months have elapsed since poor Sarah's remains were consigned to the tomb—"

"I understand, William, the delicacy of your feelings," I interrupted him: "but under existing circumstances there is no desecration of the memory of the departed in taking a step which is necessary to your own eventual happiness. Were you to remain in the same neighbourhood with Isabella, I should certainly suggest a postponement of an avowal of your affection: but you are about to return to London—some months may elapse ere you see her again—and as your hearts are already imbued with reciprocal sentiments, it would be wrong to trifle with these sacred feelings by means of delay. Explain yourself therefore to Isabella and her mother; and let it be understood that a year hence the ceremony shall take place. During this interval you will have occasional opportunities of seeing each other—you may correspond frequently—and my own friendship with Isabella will be cemented by the knowledge that we are destined to be sisters."

William again thanked me for the advice I had given him; and we both returned to the drawing-room, where we had left Mrs. Craven and her daughter. It was about seven o'clock in the evening when these little incidents took place; and as it was positively settled that William was to take his departure early next morning, I resolved to furnish him an immediate opportunity for explaining himself to Isabella Craven. Accordingly, a few minutes after we had thus returned to the drawing-room, I beckoned Mrs. Craven from the room, leaving William alone with her daughter. But I need not dwell upon this portion of my narrative. Suffice it to say that the tale of love was told by my brother, and was reciprocated by the young damsel, whose happiness was now complete. I told Mrs. Craven, when we quitted the room together, what was about to take place; and she herself was almost overwhelmed with delight.

Tears were shed on the following morning when William took his departure: but they were not tears of unmix'd sorrow;—for, as the reader may well understand, there were many reflections calculated to inspire hope and joy.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

THE PARTY AT THE HALL.

TIME rolled on: the winter passed away—and it was now the summer of 1835. During this interval I continued altogether at Clavering Hall,—but maintaining a constant correspondence with Eustace (Lord Wilberton), my brother and sister, and all my esteemed friends. Eustace had run down twice to Canterbury, putting up at the *Fountain Hotel*, and staying there three or four days on each occasion, that he might visit me at the Hall. Mrs. and Miss Craven were constant visitors, and occasionally passed a week with me at a time. The more I saw of Isabella, the more I loved her; and the greater was my satisfaction that William should have chosen such an estimable being as his intended wife. From my father I received frequent letters: he had settled at Mount Cassel, which he described as a beautiful picturesque village, on the northern frontier of France, and within view of Belgium. He wrote with a tolerable degree of cheerfulness,—having every reason to be satisfied with the position of his three surviving children. I had more than once, during this interval, proposed to pay him a visit at Mount Cassel: but he begged me to postpone it for some while yet—as he feared that if he saw me ere thoroughly habituated to his self-imposed exile and secluded mode of life, he should only experience the greater regret at separating from me again. I likewise received two or three letters from Barbauld Azetha, who had settled in the neighbourhood of New York, where she had purchased a little property; and under the name of Mrs. Anderson, was living comfortably, respectably, and happily.

It was then, as I said above, the summer of 1835; and now great preparations were being made at Clavering Hall, where I was about to receive a number of guests. I must here observe that after my succession to my present property, I should have taken my sister Jane to live with me at the Hall, had it not been that the Countess of Chilstone had earnestly entreated that she should remain in her family. Jane had experienced so much kindness from the Chilstones—and I felt myself so deeply indebted to them for having taken her under their special care and adopted her, so to speak, as one of their own circle, at a time when I was far from being so well off as I now was and did not dream of such a change in my circumstances,—that I had considered it would be exceedingly unkind and ungrateful to remove her from the bosom of that family. She had therefore remained with the Chilstones: she was now in her nineteenth year; and, as the Countess informed me in her letters, was one of the most beautiful, sweet-tempered, and accomplished young ladies that ever were seen. Ten months had elapsed since Sarah's death; and during the interval I had not seen Jane. As the period, therefore, for mourning on account of my deceased sister was drawing to a close—and as I might now begin to emancipate myself somewhat from the comparative seclusion in which I had been dwelling,—I had resolved to gather around me those relatives and friends

whose presence would so assuredly contribute to my happiness. The Hall was therefore about to receive a large number of guests. In the first place the Chilstones were coming, with Jane; and for certain reasons which will shortly be explained, I had no longer any reluctance to find myself for a period beneath the same roof with Lord Egerton. The Kingstons too had accepted my invitation; and they were to bring their four daughters—Harriet, Jessy, Maria, and Catherine. In the third place, Mrs. Summerly, Mr. Crawford, and Sybilla were to join the party. Next upon the list were Mr. Appleton and William; then followed Mrs. and Miss Craven;—and last, though not least, Lord Wilberton was to become a guest at the Hall. The reader may therefore suppose that considerable preparations were rendered necessary; and the worthy steward, Tufnell, was delighted at the prospect of beholding the Hall the scene of so much anticipated gaiety and cheerfulness.

In the first week of July the whole of my guests arrived. I never shall forget the joy with which I received them, and the varied demonstrations of friendship or of love with which I was greeted. For two whole days it was a constant arrival of travelling-carriages; and all was animation, cheerful bustle, and excitement. Mrs. Kingston was as handsome as ever; and though now in her fortieth year, she might easily have passed herself off as much younger. The good-hearted Squire looked the very picture of health and happiness; and he wrung my hand with so much force that he almost brought tears into my eyes. Harriet, the eldest daughter, was now seventeen, and promised to rival her mother in personal beauty: Jessy, who was fifteen—and Maria, who was thirteen, were also sweet girls, good-tempered and frank-hearted. Catherine was now nine; and though she of course could not recollect that I ever acted as her nursemaid, she nevertheless knew me well, as it was only a year since I was at the Grange on my return from Italy; and the affection she had always entertained for me, was speedily revived. Mrs. Summerly was in excellent health, and on her arrival embraced me with a truly parental affection. Sybilla and I met as if we were sisters; and her husband Mr. Crawford was rejoiced to see me again. Nor was Mr. Appleton less cordial in the display of his esteem: the same may be said of the Earl and Countess of Chilstone;—while Lord Egerton and I met on the footing of old established friendship. Jane was indeed a most charming creature; and I had every reason to be proud of her as a sister. I need hardly add that William and Isabella were overjoyed to meet once more; and on my own side, I must confess that it was with a heartfelt joy that I beheld the appearance of Eustace,—knowing that he was to remain a whole month at the Hall, during which time we should have so many opportunities for fond discourse: and it was also with pleasure I reflected that in a few brief months we should be united no more to separate.

It was a large party, therefore, assembled at Clavering Hall; and not for a single instant during the month that these gaieties lasted, did the time hang heavily upon our hands. Infinite was the joy of Squire Kingston and his wife when

they found that I was no longer fearful of riding on horseback; and on the first occasion that a riding-party was formed, the Squire was loud and hearty in the compliments which he paid me for my equestrian skill. I had taken good care, previous to the arrival of my guests, to have a sufficient number of steeds for the accommodation of those whom I thought likely to use them; and I had not forgotten to provide ponies for the Kingstons' three youngest daughters,—Harriet, the eldest, now riding a full-sized horse. Eustace was a most graceful cavalier, and fond of the exercise: he too was therefore pleased to find that during the last few months I had been practising in the same sphere. Jane rode beautifully; and Lord Egerton, during our excursions, always managed to be by her side.

From this last observation the reader may perhaps comprehend whence I had no longer any reluctance to meet this young nobleman; but I will now more explicitly state that in several letters which I had received from the Countess of Chilstone during the last few months, she had more than hinted a growing attachment on the part of her son for my sister Jane. It must not be thought that this transfer of his affections from myself to Jane denoted any vacillation of character—much less giddiness or levity, on Lord Egerton's part. Years had now elapsed since he first loved me—and also since he was made aware that I was engaged to another; and though that love of his had endured for a considerable time, as the reader has seen,—yet it had naturally lost its ardour under the cloud of disappointment,—gradually being attempered down into resigned submission to its destiny, so that it was equally natural that it should die out of existence. Nor was this new attachment rashly and precipitately formed. It took birth in his heart slowly—expanded gradually—but still continued to progress under the influence of the personal charms and mental accomplishments of its object. Living together beneath the same roof—constantly in each other's society—and from the very first learning to regard each other with the warmth of friendship, it was almost inevitable that the result would be such as I now describe it, and that a reciprocal affection would take possession of the hearts of Lord Egerton and my sister. I was unteignedly rejoiced that such was the case—I was rejoiced that Jane should be wooed by one whose excellent principles and steadiness of conduct were even greater recommendations than his handsome person, his present rank, and his future prospects; and I was rejoiced too, inasmuch as I was now enabled to meet Lord Egerton without a feeling of restraint, and without the slightest sense of awkwardness and embarrassment existing between us. I valued his friendship, and looked forward with delight to the time when he should become my brother-in-law.

One morning—it was in the third week of the gaieties at Clavering Hall—I was walking alone with Eustace through the grounds in front of the mansion, when we perceived a large and somewhat lumbering yellow carriage approaching up the drive; and as it drew a little nearer, I recognised the Twisdens' equipage. A radiant pink bonnet appeared at one of the windows; and a white handkerchief was waved furiously by a lemon-



colour gloved hand that was protruded forth. I immediately told Eustace who our new visitors were; and we took a short cut to the entrance of the Hall, which we reached at the moment that the equipage rolled up. I must confess that on glancing inside the carriage to see whom it contained, I was somewhat relieved on observing that Mr. and Mrs. Twisden were its only occupants: for I was rather apprehensive at the outset lest Miss Miranda, with her Brighton boarding-school airs—Mr. Gustavus with his college pranks—or Master Dickey with his ill-temper, should have been brought to bless us with their presence.

"Well, my dear Miss Clavering," said the old gentleman, as he alighted first from the vehicle and grasped me cordially by the hand, "I am so glad to see you! I hope that we do not intrude—And God bless my soul! this must be Lord Wilberton!"—and now Mr. Twisden's hand grasped

that of Eustace, who had just assisted Mrs. Twisden to descend from the carriage.

"There now, Mr. Twisden," she at once cried, "don't monopolize our friends entirely to yourself. My dearest, dearest Miss Clavering, pray let me embrace you!"—then having inflicted upon me this proof of the wondrous affection she had conceived for me in my prosperity (but which she never showed when I was a humble servant in her household), she turned to Eustace; and giving him her lemon-colour gloved hand, exclaimed, "Dear me, my lord, it is a perfect age since I saw your lordship! Let me think. Eight years ago, I declare!—and then you were only plain Mr. Quentin. But I am charmed to find you with my dear friend, Mary——Miss Clavering, I mean:"—and she looked marvellously knowing, as much as to imply that she perfectly understood on what footing Eustace and I were together.

"Pray walk in," I hastened to observe, in order to cut short this display of bad taste on her part.

"But one word first, my dear Miss Clavering," said Mrs. Twisden. "The fact is, for a long, long time I and Mr. T. have been talking of coming over to the Hall to pay our respects——"

"And I had the greatest trouble to prevent you," interposed the old gentleman; "knowing that Miss Clavering was unfortunately in mourning."

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden—and let me speak, if you please. Well, my dear Miss Clavering, as I was saying, we had long resolved to come and pay you a visit: but Mr. T. was always fidgetting about 'intrusions' and such like nonsense—till at last I saw in the *Kentish paper* a paragraph—let me see, what did it say?—Oh, I remember!—'*Miss Price Clavering is entertaining a select circle of visitors, amongst whom are Lord Wilberton and the Earl and Countess of Chilstone, at Clavering Hall.*' So then I said to Mr. T. that we need no longer hesitate to pay our respects: we knew that we should be welcome—and therefore, my dear Miss Clavering, with your permission, we purpose to remain a day or two with you."

"She would bring them all with her," said Mr. Twisden, with a sort of groan, as he glanced at a number of trunks and bandboxes piled up behind the carriage, and which I had not before noticed.

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Twisden!" exclaimed the lady. "I shall not forget in a hurry at what a rate you went on this morning, just because I insisted on putting together a few little necessities to bring with me."

"Necessaries indeed!" said the old gentleman: "there's a whole wardrobe."

"I am sure, my dear Miss Clavering," resumed Mrs. Twisden, after having flung a vixenish glance of deprecation at her husband, "you will be very much disappointed I have not brought any of your favourites with me. But Miranda is still at Miss Tubley's at Brighton, where she is getting on famously; and Gustarus is also still at College——"

"Where he is playing the very deuce," interjected Mr. Twisden, with another audible groan.

"For shame of you!" vociferated his wife; "you would deny the poor boy two hundred guineas for his hunter——"

"And as much more for his tailor's bill," said the old gentleman, pulling a very long face.

"And that dear Dickey, your own special favourite," continued Mrs. Twisden, again addressing me, "is still at Dr. Birchington's at Ramsgate——"

"And an uncommon good birching he has too once a-week, for making faces," moaned Mr. Twisden lugubriously.

"Ah! I dare say you would crush out all the spirit of the dear boy," retorted his wife. "But never, Mr. Twisden, as long as I live to be his shield against a father's tyranny!"—and for an instant Mrs. Twisden waved her arm with that tragedy-queen air which she could not altogether forget.

I now gave orders to have the baggage taken down from behind the carriage; and though my

servants performed this duty with the utmost care, Mrs. Twisden was the whole time in a perfect fever lest any of the articles should be spoilt. She felt convinced that the white bonnet in the blue band-box was crushed to atoms; and it was all through Mr. Twisden's unkindness in hurrying the departure from the Lodge. As for that large box tied round with the green cord, she begged that it might be kept with the lid upward; and she had taken special pains to write "*Glass*" at the top in huge letters, although it contained nothing but caps and bonnets, and was so light that any one could tell there was nothing so heavy as glass inside. Then there was the large black trunk:—great care must be taken how it was carried upstairs, for it was only corded and not locked. She had hunted everywhere for the key, but could not find it; and if it was the last word she ever spoke, she should express her conviction that Mr. Twisden had hidden that abominable key on purpose to vex her. However, the baggage was at length disposed of to Mrs. Twisden's satisfaction; and she and her husband were conducted up to a chamber, where the lady busied herself for an hour in making a complete change in her toilet, so that she might appear in true splendour by the time luncheon was served up.

Both I and Eustace took care to whisper amongst our friends what sort of a lady Mrs. Twisden was, so that they might not be taken unawares by the display of her peculiarities; for we both felt loth, on kind old Mr. Twisden's account, that she should be treated with any coldness. In due time the bell was rung for luncheon; and when we were all assembled in the room where it was served up, plans were discussed for passing the interval till dinner. It was resolved with many of us to form a riding-party—whereupon Mrs. Twisden at once exclaimed, as she threw a fierce look across the table at her husband, who was seated opposite to her, "There now, Mr. T., you see how provoking you always are! I wanted to have Esmeralda brought across: but you did go on so, that I was forced to give way; and now you see, I shall be unable to join the riding-party!"

"If, as I suppose, Mrs. Twisden," I observed, "your regrets are in reference to a favourite horse of your's, I think that I can accommodate you with one that you may ride in all safety."

"She has never yet ridden in her life," said Mr. Twisden, who, being at a distance from his wife on this occasion, ventured to be more courageous than was his wont in speaking his mind.

There was another fierce look darted at the old gentleman; and then Mrs. Twisden, instantaneously putting on her most amiable aspect again, proceeded to give explanations in respect to Esmeralda.

"You must know, my dear Miss Clavering," she said, "that for a long, long time I had been thinking that I should like to ride on horseback—particularly as that dear girl Miranda, who is such a special favourite of your's, has been learning to ride at Brighton."

"Nice riding-masters there, by all accounts!" observed Mr. Twisden, in an undertone to Mr. Appleton, who was sitting next to him: "they run away with all the girls."

"Because you know," continued Mrs. Twisden, "it would be so very tiresome when Miranda is at

home, if she had nobody to ride out with. So, all things considered, I had made up my mind I *would* ride; and I should have bought a horse for the purpose some time back, only Mr. T. did go on so about it, that for the sake of peace and quietness I let the matter drop. But the other day, when I was shopping in Canterbury—And do you know, my dear Miss Clavering, that after having spent five hours in the mercers' shops, and turned over everything they had got, I could not find a single thing that suited me! It is so very provoking: and what is worst of all, the trades-people look so glum when you go away without buying anything—just as if one is compelled to make purchases of things that won't suit or that one doesn't want! But about this horse. I had finished my shopping—or rather I had finished searching for what I wanted, and had given it up in despair, after having wasted my time—”

“And the mercers' time too,” added Mr. Twisden.

“For five mortal hours,” proceeded the lady,—“when, as I was going back to the *Fountain*, to rejoin Mr. T., I saw a man leading such a beautiful horse. It was white, but with five or six immense large brown spots upon it—just for all the world like some of those one sees at Astley's horsemanship in London. Well, I suppose the man who led it, saw that I was struck by the peculiar beauty of the animal; and he asked me if I wanted such a thing—”

“Of course you did,” observed Mr. Twisden, still exceedingly brave on the strength of being at such a distance from his wife.

“Yes—of course I did, Mr. T.,” she responded sharply: “and that's the reason I told the man to lead it to the hotel; and on getting the hostler to examine it, and he pronouncing it to be sound, I made you buy it for me. The man assured me, my dear Miss Clavering, that it was the nicest, and gentlest, and most tractable creature that ever was seen; and as he looked a most respectable person, I have no doubt it will turn out as he said.”

“So it ought—seventy guineas for that mare!” observed Mr. Twisden: and impelled by the association of ideas at the time aroused in his mind, he buttoned up his breeches-pockets.

“Then you have not tried your Esmeralda yet,” I asked, “so as to verify the assurances of the person who sold her?”

“No—not yet,” answered Mrs. Twisden. “The fact is that something has every day prevented me; and then there was the delay in having my riding-habit made—buying my hat and whip—and getting a side-saddle to fit. She is such a beautiful creature: such a mane and tail! and all dappled as I tell you! So I called her Esmeralda. I thought it such a sweet name; and I met it in a book. But,” she added with sudden vehemence, “I declare that I will send over the coachman presently on one of our carriage-horses to bring Esmeralda; and I will ride her to-morrow!”

“Better let somebody else try her first,” said Mr. Twisden.

“How absurd!” cried the lady, as she flung upon her husband another rapid but menacing look. “Just as if one doesn't ride by intuition—I mean naturally, you know. Yes—it is decided! I will send for Esmeralda.”

And so Mrs. Twisden did; and in the evening Jacob the coachman, who had been despatched to the Lodge on purpose, returned with Mrs. Twisden's newly-acquired favourite. She certainly was a very beautiful creature, and fully justified the *encomia* which Mrs. Twisden had passed upon her: but at the same time I thought that her colour rendered her much more suitable for a horsemanship than for private use—especially to be ridden by a lady.

On the following morning, soon after breakfast, a riding-party having been formed, Mrs. Twisden appeared in her new habit; and no doubt to set off her looks to all the greater advantage, she wore in her hat plumes of such immense size that they drooped down upon her shoulder. The steeds were in readiness; and amongst them was Esmeralda. I must do Mrs. Twisden the justice to say that she displayed no ordinary degree of courage in consenting to mount a horse which had not as yet been tried by any one with whom she was acquainted: for while it was at the Lodge during the few days that had elapsed since its purchase, she would not hear of the groom mounting it to give it exercise—but insisted on his merely leading it out. She was so dreadfully afraid lest it should be spoilt.

But to continue. All those who had formed the riding-party were mounted; and I believe that we were all likewise equally anxious to see how Esmeralda would acquit herself. We began to move away from the front of the Hall; and Mrs. Twisden touched the animal on the right shoulder with her riding-whip—whereupon Esmeralda began advancing sideways.

“Touch her on the other shoulder, my dear,” exclaimed Mr. Twisden, who was standing on the steps to see us depart on our excursion.

“Hold your tongue, Mr. T. I know how to manage her,” responded his wife: but she did nevertheless follow his counsel by dealing the steed a pretty smart stroke over the left shoulder. Thereupon Esmeralda, wheeling partially round, continued to advance sideways—but this time with the left shoulder forward.

“What can be the matter with the horse?” said Mrs. Twisden: and patting the animal's neck, she added in a coaxing tone, “There now, pretty dear—go quiet!”

But so far from going quiet at this entreaty, Esmeralda would not go at all—but suddenly stood stock-still; and raising one of her fore-legs, kept it bent up under her, thus standing on the other three. Again Mrs. Twisden patted the animal's neck—but this time on the contrary side to that where she had stroked her before: and now Esmeralda, letting down the right leg, put up the left, still remaining stock-still upon three.

“Well, I can't make it out,” said Mrs. Twisden, now in a perfect pet, and her face crimson. “But I won't be beaten like this:”—and she hit Esmeralda rather a smart blow on the right side. Thereupon the animal coolly and deliberately knelt down with its fore-legs on the soft grass; and as she kept her hind-legs standing, the posture the animal thus assumed was not merely most inconvenient for Mrs. Twisden to maintain her seat on its back, but the whole spectacle was ludicrous to a degree. Perfectly infuriated, but yet with her pride rebelling against the idea of being beaten by her newly-

purchased horse, Mrs. Twisden dealt the animal a couple of smart blows on the right side,—upon which the really intelligent Esmeralda, starting up from its knees, reared high up in the air on her hind-legs, and began walking thus,—so that poor Mrs. Twisden was compelled to cling round its neck in order to maintain her place on the saddle. I now heard some tittering around me: and no wonder—for the sight was really most laughable. In a fit of desperation, Mrs. Twisden gave Esmeralda another blow with her whip. I did not exactly see this time where it was dealt: but the effect was rapid;—for the animal, letting down its fore-legs again, and resuming for a moment its natural posture, began to lie down on its right side—which it did completely,—and then pretended to be dead. Mrs. Twisden glided off somehow or another as this catastrophe was taking place; and in her rage she lashed the recumbent steed. Up sprang Esmeralda, and began to gallop round the grass-plot, describing a complete circle—performing the strangest antics—and in every respect showing off just like a trained steed in a horsemanship.

"There now, Mr. T., this is all through you!" cried his enraged better-half: "it would never have happened if you had done your duty as a husband and bought me a proper horse in the first instance. But I won't keep this horrid Esmeralda another instant! I will send it into Canterbury and sell it for what it will fetch, even if it goes to the knacker's yard. Come, Mr. T., bustle about and call Jacob. He shall ride off with Esmeralda at once."

"Not on her, my dear," replied Mr. Twisden: "for at the rate you have been going—three paces in half-an-hour, and those performed on the hind-legs—Jacob would never get into Canterbury at all. But here he is."

The Twisdens' coachman made his appearance at this moment; and he could not help wearing a sly smile—for he had doubtless beheld at a little distance the whole of the ludicrous scene which I have been endeavouring to describe. The orders which Mrs. Twisden gave were peremptory: but it was some time before Esmeralda could be caught. When she was at length captured, the coachman led her away, not choosing to get upon her back and stand a chance of being made the victim of similar pranks to that which the animal had played his mistress. I proposed that another horse should be got ready for Mrs. Twisden: but she declared that she would rather keep Mr. T. company for this particular morning,—at which intimation her husband made a wry grimace, as much as to signify that he could very well dispense with such a sudden demonstration of tenderness. We accordingly all rode off without her; and during our excursion, much of the conversation turned on what had taken place. The solution of the whole affair was plain enough. Esmeralda had really belonged to a horsemanship, and was well disciplined to obey each particular touch of the whip, every stripe thus administered being suggestive of some particular antic or freak which the animal had been taught. I could not help pitying Mrs. Twisden: for though she was far from being a favourite of mine, yet it always grieved me to see persons placed in a position calculated to render them ridiculous. I had no

doubt in my own mind that it was from sheer spite and vexation she had refused to have another horse saddled and join our riding-party, and moreover that she purposed to vent the full power of these agreeable feelings upon Mr. Twisden.

We remained out riding for about three hours; and on our return, as we were wending our way through the park, Eustace, who was by my side, was suddenly struck with a feeling of alarm on beholding the legs of a man projecting from out a knot of evergreens which we were passing at the time. He sprang from his horse, and rushed thither with a horrible idea (as he afterwards informed us) of discovering the corpse of some murdered victim. But how infinite was his relief and our own, when Mr. Twisden emerged from that place of concealment—for as such indeed he had used it. At the same time Mrs. Twisden—no longer in her riding-habit, but in a gay morning toilet—came rushing along the grass, exclaiming while even yet at a distance, "How dare you run away from me, Mr. T.? I have been looking for you everywhere! You did it on purpose. I told you to wait—but you slipped away while I went up to change my things; and for more than two mortal hours have I been looking for you everywhere."

"Indeed, my dear—I am very sorry," said her husband meekly: "but I felt drowsy—I thought I would have a little nap—and the sun being very fierce, I deposited myself under the shade of those bays and laurels."

While he was yet speaking, up came an individual who I at once knew to be a porter at the *Fountain Hotel* in Canterbury; and touching his hat, he presented a note to Mr. Twisden. This gentleman, at once breaking it open, read its contents as follow:—

"jale, canterberri.

onnerd sur, this eums 2 inform u that i am in sadd trubbel about the mair nesneralga. i tuk she to the orsemarkit and tied sum straw to the tale wich is 2 lett peple no she war fur sail. wen in a jiffly up eums a gent wich is manniger of a orsemanshipp and sais as how sais he, that the mair is his'n and that i must go to pris'n. so we goes afore the justass of the pece. and wen i sais as how sais i, i am mr. twisding's coehman, the justass sais as how e thinks as how its all my gammon and that ive orest myself up in livverly all the better 2 do the trick. so here i be, lade up in lavingder. so onnerd sur plesum or send and bale me out or get me out sum how or nother i don't care how so as its due. the mair was stoleo from the manniger of the orsemanshipp when the orsemanshipp war at the sitty of rochester three weeks ago. its a bad job for all parties except the manniger wich has got his horse again. so no more at present from your fatful 2 command

"jacob brogson."

"There now, Mr. T.," cried his wife, who had been reading the note over his shoulder: "here's a pretty scrape you have got the poor man into!"

"I, my dear!" exclaimed the old gentleman: "really my conscience acquits me of any share in the transaction."

"Oh! but it's all your fault though!" cried the lady in a querulous tone: "it's all along of your not buying me a horse in the first instance: for if you had, I never should have thought of buying that nasty Esmeralda. Indeed, I never liked her—I always knew from the first that she would turn out bad: it was all through you that I was driven into it."

"But what is amiss?" I inquired.

Mr. Twisden handed me the note; and when I had read it, he bade me let it circulate amongst the party—which I accordingly did.

"You must go and see about it at once, Mr. T.," exclaimed his wife, "and get yourself and Jacob out of this scrape that you have got yourselves into."

"I will accompany Mr. Twisden," said Eustace; and Lord Egerton at once proffered the old gentleman the horse which he was riding.

"Now ain't you ashamed of yourself, to put their lordships to such inconvenience!" ejaculated Mrs. Twisden. "Here's Lord Wilberton to be dragged away from better society to go along with you—and Lord Egerton to walk up to the Hall that you may have his horse!"

"Which is no very great inconvenience, my dear madam," said the last-mentioned young nobleman,—"seeing that the distance is barely two hundred yards."

Mr. Twisden mounted the horse thus proffered him, and set out with Eustace for Canterbury. On arriving there, they at once found out the master of the horsemanship; and Mr. Twisden corroborated the assurance already given by Jacob that Esmeralda had been honestly bought, however dishonestly the seller might have come by it. It was necessary to go before the Mayor and explain the same particulars, so as to procure the immediate release of Jacob. When Lord Wilberton and Mr. Twisden were announced, the Mayor received them with the utmost civility; and indeed Mr. Twisden was personally known to him. There was consequently no difficulty in effecting the coachman's emancipation: the master of the horsemanship regained possession of the animal that had been stolen; and here the matter terminated.

I need not dwell at any greater length upon the incidents which marked the entertainment of my large party of guests at the Hall. Suffice it to say, that when the month was over, the company began to break up and to repair to their respective homes. It was now arranged between me and the Chilstones, that Jane should continue at the Hall for the present: but before her kind friends took their departure, Lord Egerton made her an offer of his hand—which was accepted. It was agreed that the nuptials should take place in the early part of the ensuing year, when *other* marriages were likewise to be celebrated: I allude to mine with Lord Wilberton, and my brother's with Miss Craven. I received pressing invitations to pass a few weeks with the Crawfords in Essex, and with the Kingstons at the Grange; but I privately besought Sybilla on the one hand and Mrs. Kingston on the other to excuse me for the present, as I wished to remain with my sister at Clavering Hall until after our marriages.

At length all the guests had departed: Eustace had gone—William likewise—and I and Jane were left alone together at the mansion. For the first few days we felt it rather dull after so much gaiety and such numbers of companions: we felt somewhat melancholy also, at being separated from those who had most special claims on our regards—namely, our brother William, Lord Wilberton, and Lord Egerton. But we soon regained our cheerfulness: for our future prospects were bright, and we were moreover pleased at being again together.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

THE MEDICAL STUDENTS.

THE circumstances which I am now about to relate, are supplied me from a journal kept by my brother William. As the reader is already aware, he was studying to qualify himself for the medical profession—or in other terms, was "walking the hospitals." Medical students generally are not cited as examples of steadiness and regularity of conduct; and thus William had all along been much on his guard as to those with whom he associated. There were however some few young men of the same well-ordered principles as his own; and with these he was more intimate than with the rest. One especially had secured his friendship—a young man of about his own age, and who was a perfect enthusiast in the prosecution of his studies. Mark Shelburne—for that was his name—was an orphan, entirely dependent upon an uncle, who was not particularly well off, and who, it was supposed, generously stinted himself in many respects for the purpose of providing the necessary funds to enable his nephew to qualify for the medical profession. Mr. Shelburne, senior, resided in a provincial town; and as he was a widower and childless, and fondly attached to Mark, he loved to have the young man to pass a few weeks with him as often as circumstances would permit. But Mark, as above observed, was so passionately devoted to his studies and his experiments, that it was with great difficulty the old gentleman could induce him to quit London, even at those distant intervals. He was a handsome young man, with dark hair and eyes—a pale pensive countenance—and great amiability of manners. Nevertheless, there was something peculiar in the constitution of his mind, which, if not actually morbid, was at all events eccentric. He was naturally of a melancholy disposition—frequently desponding without the slightest apparent cause—and sometimes a prey to such wretchedness of spirits that he had been induced to have recourse to opium. When under the influence of this delusive and pernicious drug, he was wont to give way to the wildest imaginings; and his conversation would on such occasions be replete with the strangest theories and the most startling hypotheses. He however shunned society; and therefore few beheld him in those hours when he thus gave the rein to his unnaturally excited imagination.

William was the only one of all the medical students attending the lectures at St. Thomas's Hospital, with whom Mark Shelburne formed a friendship: but from the very first he was attracted towards my brother,—who in his turn experienced a deep interest on behalf of his fellow-student. When they grew intimate together, William frequently sought, in as delicate a way as possible, to remonstrate with Mark on the use of opium: but the latter declared that some of his brightest ideas had been furnished him when under the influence of that drug. It was not at first that he admitted William into the privacy of his own apartment at the lodgings which he occupied in Southwark—I mean at those times when he was revelling in the fantastic visions and wild speculations encouraged by the opium. But after a

period, as their friendship merged into intimacy, he was wont to insist that William should come and see him; and as he had managed to amass out of his small allowance—and frequently at the cost of necessities—many curious books and several remarkable anatomical models and specimens, my brother felt an interest in the inspection of these curiosities. He had also the friendly hope of weaning Mark from the use of the drug, and, by means of cheerful companionship elevating his spirits so as to render it unnecessary.

There was, so to speak, a fearful kind of interest at times in Shelburne's discourse, when under the influence of opium. He was wont to declare that the novel of "Frankenstein," in which (as doubtless all my readers are aware) there is the description of a living man being made out of a mass of clay, was not so extravagant in its wondrous conception as the world generally supposed; and that he believed the time would come when such creations would be actually accomplished. He declared, too, that the idea of an elixir having the power to prolong human life to a great period—if not actually to immortalize it—must have had its origin in some facts known to the philosophers of a former age, but which was lost to the present one;—and the discovery of this grand secret he likewise considered to be within the range of possibility. In the transmutation of metals by a precipitate powder, anciently called "the philosopher's stone," Mark Shelburne likewise believed: but as this properly belonged to chemistry, and not to the medical art, he was wont to mention it merely as something which entered amongst the articles of his faith, but which he never intended to make one of his pursuits. In respect to the other matters—namely, the creation of a living being on the Frankenstein principle, and the discovery of the elixir of life—he proclaimed his fixed resolve to pursue those mysteries whensoever circumstances should afford him leisure and opportunity.

When my brother first listened to these rhapsodies, he did not like to shock his friend's mind by ridiculing them; and at the time it was perfectly useless to argue or expostulate,—especially as when under the influence of the opium, Mark Shelburne was a continuous talker, and could not rein in or settle his ideas sufficiently to become a listener. It was a continuous stream of wild speculations and preternatural hypotheses which thus flowed from his lips—a current that carried himself away, and which no companion could possibly arrest. But after a while—when William perceived that the visions of those periods which might be termed the intervals of intoxication, exercised their sway over Shelburne's mind in his sober hours—he thought it his duty as a friend to remonstrate. He did so; and then Mark becoming a listener, the subjects above-mentioned were debated and discussed between them. But as time wore on, Mark Shelburne grew more enthusiastically fervid and fanatically resolute in his strange beliefs; so that William viewed with sorrow the probability of a really fine intellect being totally wrecked or sinking into a gloomy monomania. For Shelburne was really a young man of brilliant talent, if it were properly directed—and endowed with the largest mental capacities, if judiciously wielded. This conversation had peculiar charms, even when he was indulging in his wildest rhapsodies. Beautiful ideas and

splendid images would be thrown off like sparks struck from an anvil; and such was his extraordinary eloquence when excited with his topics, and under the influence of the delusive drug, that his discourse possessed a fascination truly irresistible.

From all that has been said, the reader will have comprehended that Mark Shelburne was a most peculiar character—but nevertheless an interesting one. A dreamer and a visionary in some respects, he was thoroughly practical and soberly intelligent in others; and thus he made an astonishing progress in his medical and surgical studies,—the very enthusiasm of his nature carrying him on at an almost whirlwind speed, but yet indelibly impressing upon his memory every object which he had to contemplate as he passed. That memory of his was of a most retentive power; and after attending a lecture, he could not merely repeat in due order all the arguments or facts enunciated, but could even recite the very language in which they had been delivered from the lips of the speaker.

Mark Shelburne occupied lodgings in a house situate in a street almost entirely let out in a similar way to medical students attending St. Thomas's and Guy's Hospitals. He occupied the second floor: the first floor was tenanted by another student, named Frederick Newton. And a very different character was he in most respects from Mark Shelburne. Indeed, the only point of similitude was in his handsome appearance; and herein he even had the advantage of the other, by the possession of a finer form and of vigorous health. But in intellectual capacity he was almost completely wanting—save and except for purposes requiring cunning and artifice. He was in reality addicted to dissipation—but managed to conceal it from the general knowledge of those whom he was desirous to conciliate. Indeed, when it suited his views, he could affect the utmost steadiness of conduct, and a most industrious application to his studies. He could seem regular when in reality most irregular. Such was the course of duplicity which he carried on in a certain quarter in which Mark Shelburne was likewise interested.

In the same street where these young men dwelt, and where so many of their fellow-students also tenanted lodgings, there resided an old man and his daughter, named Southgate. The house which they occupied would have been the gloomiest in all the street—where indeed none of the habitations had a very cheerful exterior—were it not that the window-ledges were embellished with flowers indicating the presiding care of a female hand; but in respect to paint and repairs, this particular house was sadly deficient. The truth is, old Southgate was a most penurious and money-loving individual; and even the very flowers which were thus assiduously tended by his beautiful daughter, Edwinna, were an eyesore to her miserly father. He had been an attorney in his time—but was struck off the rolls for nefarious practices; and then had turned money-lender. But with all his misdeeds when a solicitor, and with all his grasping, avaricious habits, he had accumulated but a small amount, through too frequently over-reaching himself in his endeavour to make considerable gains. With but a very limited capital, therefore, had he commenced the system of bill-discounting for the medical students of that street and the small

tradesmen in the neighbourhood. Here also that same grasping rapacity frequently reacted upon himself; and what with a variety of losses, he still continued a poor man. His disposition was soured—even if it had ever been amiable: at all events, it had become morose and harsh, stern and implacable, with the selfishness of his pursuits.

His wife had died of a broken heart at the time of his disgrace as a lawyer; and this was about fourteen or fifteen years previous to the date of which I am writing. Edwina was now eighteen, and therefore she remembered but too little of her mother to feel the severity of her loss. Left an only child to the care of such a father, it is not likely that she would have received any education at all, had it not been for the affectionate kindness of an aunt, who, having a small independent income, took Edwina under her own special protection. By this worthy relative was the young girl in due course placed at school, where she was well instructed: but just at the time that she quitted the seminary, when a little past sixteen, her aunt died after a short illness. The income she had enjoyed, perished with her; and Edwina was once more thrown upon her father's hands. Then, from a cheerful country village, she had to change her abode to the gloomy house where her sire dwelt; and from the enjoyment of comforts, she now found herself scarcely in the possession of necessities. Old Southgate was still intent upon making a fortune which incessantly eluded his grasp; and if he were no poorer, he was decidedly no richer than when he first commenced business as a money-lender. Edwina found a wretched home in all respects,—wretched on account of her father's temper—wretched with the house ill-furnished, and dilapidated in many parts—wretched with the dirty drab of a servant-girl who could alone be found to accept such miserable wages and still more miserable fare that old Southgate chose to afford. Nevertheless Edwina endeavoured to do her duty towards her parent—to keep up her own spirits—and to make the place look as neat and cheerful as circumstances would possibly permit.

She was a beautiful girl—tall, of slender and symmetrical shape—with azure eyes, and flaxen hair, the glossy masses of which when floating on her neck and shoulders, rendered her a being angelically radiant. And such a being to have such a father, and to dwell in such a house—to be debarred all society—to have no female friends crossing that gloomy threshold to cheer an occasional hour—to hear scarcely any voice save that of her father, and he never speaking except to grumble at his own affairs or at what he termed the extravagance of his household,—surely this was the saddest lot which a young girl could possibly know! And for a young girl, too, with a generous heart and sensitive mind—with delicate feelings and an amiable disposition—such a mode of life was barely tolerable. Nevertheless, Edwina did endure it—but rather with a resigned patience than with any more cheerful feelings; and there were moments when even this amount of fortune abandoned her, and she would weep in secret.

Old Southgate's house was situated precisely opposite to that in which Mark Shelburne and Frederick Newton resided. Both these young men had beheld Edwina Southgate, but with different feelings: and both had managed to form her

acquaintance, but under very different circumstances. First in respect to feelings:—Mark Shelburne had learnt to love her as an angel deserving the full power of worship which his enthusiastic soul was capable of offering up: while, on the other hand, Frederick Newton looked upon her as a beautiful creature to be possessed, no matter by what means. The former adored her with all the fervency of holiest sentiment: the other with the ardour of impassioned sense. And now for the circumstances under which these young men respectively became acquainted with her:—One evening Mark Shelburne rescued her from the insulting conduct of some half-intoxicated insolent young men, when she had hurried forth into a neighbouring street to make some purchase which her father had required. Frederick Newton, on the other hand, had called upon old Southgate to procure a loan of money; and thus did he become acquainted with the beautiful Edwina.

Both the young men came to know her at about the same time—namely, some five or six months previous to the date of which I am writing. Mark Shelburne, needing no pecuniary loan, had no pretence for crossing her father's threshold: but he frequently met Edwina in the neighbourhood—their acquaintance progressed—and it ripened into love. Often and often, of an evening, would Edwina meet Mark at some short distance; and for an hour would they walk together,—she leaning upon his arm, and listening to the assurances of heartfelt affection which he poured into her ears. She was all simplicity and guileless innocence; and she learnt to love that pale, pensive, but handsome-looking young man with all the fondness of her soul. In the confidence inspired by this feeling, she told him how her earlier years had been passed—how she was indebted to her deceased relative for her education—how bitterly and how severely she had to deplore the loss she had sustained in her—how unhappy she was at home—and how she sometimes wept in secret. Mark would listen to her with tears in his eyes; and in the sympathy which he offered, the poor girl found the sweetest solace. They pledged themselves to each other—they vowed to remain mutually true and faithful until such time as circumstances should permit their hands to be united in marriage; and it was in these delicious moments that Mark Shelburne's spirits rose naturally, without artificial stimulant; and he became sanguine as to his future success. Indeed, on this head he seldom had any doubt: for it has already been explained that his fits of despondency arose without a cause and pointed at nothing definite.

But, as already said, Edwina had another admirer; and this was Frederick Newton,—who, by various cunning artifices and astute means, had wormed his way into old Southgate's confidence. The money he borrowed on the occasion that he formed Edwina's acquaintance, he managed punctually to refund to the very day; and about a week afterwards he borrowed another sum, though not absolutely wanting it at the moment. He borrowed it, too, for a very short period—at the expiration of which he duly returned it: then affecting to be deeply grateful for the old man's kindness in lending the sum, he sent him a handsome present of wine and provisions. Again, after a short interval, he requested a loan again: he repaid it to the day

and the hour—and again he sent a gift of things which he knew would be most welcome to the parsimonious Southgate. Thus he went on, borrowing frequently—repaying punctually—and sending presents periodically. Several objects were thus gained. In the first place he obtained the credit with Mr. Southgate of being an honourable, prudent, and steady young man: secondly he won his favour by suffering himself to be usuriously plundered in the shape of exorbitant interest, commission, and *bonus*, on the frequent loans, as well as by sending those numerous gifts: and thirdly, the whole proceeding furnished him with pretexts for constant calls at Southgate's house. But these were not all the artifices he practised. He ascertained from Southgate which medical students were behindhand in their payments: he undertook to make them settle their liabilities; and in many instances he succeeded by threats of exposure and of writing to their friends, or else by sheer bullying. In process of time Southgate began to invite Frederick Newton to his house to tea or supper,—well knowing that for the sorry meal he thus gave the young student, he was certain to receive a munificent gift on the following day. Newton was thus the only one who for years had been invited across that gloomy threshold for any other purpose than that of actual business.

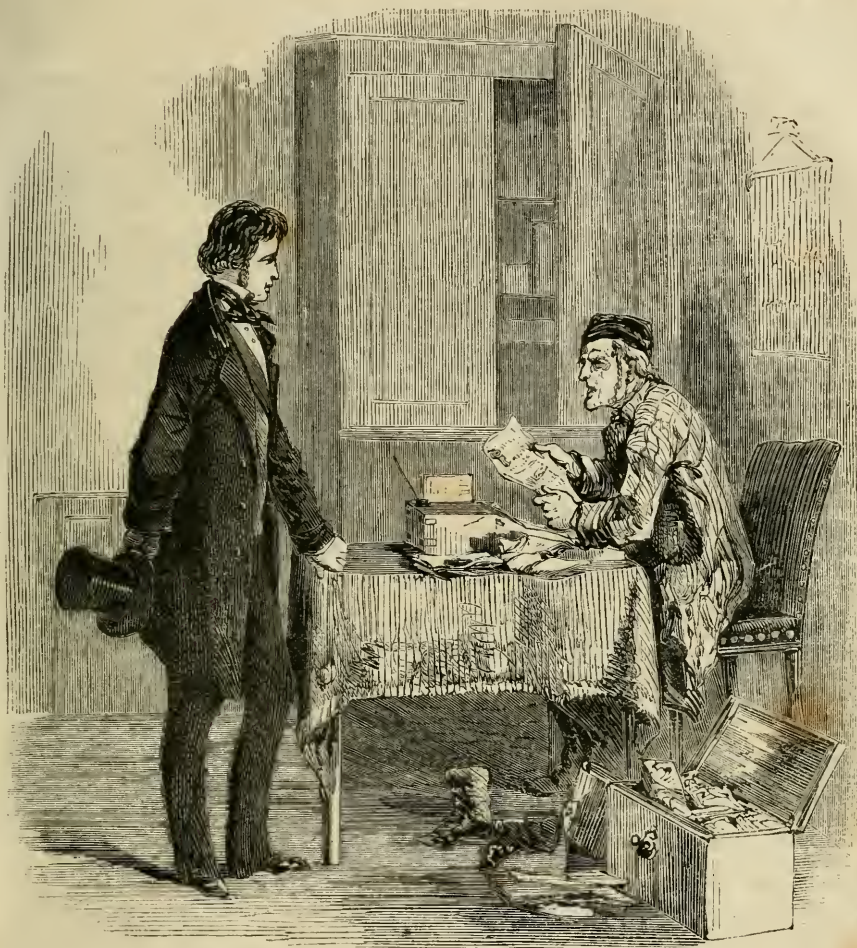
All along he played a deep game in respect to Edwina. Far from suspecting that the young maiden had given her heart to Mark Shelburne—ignorant even that they were acquainted with each other—he thought that there was no hurry in declaring himself to Southgate's daughter; that precipitation would spoil all; and that he ought to study how to ingratiate himself by degrees into her good graces as he had done with her father. He thus paid her the most respectful attention,—gradually—but *very* gradually indeed—putting himself on a more intimate footing; yet still continuing to treat her with the most unexceptionable courtesy. At length his attentions became somewhat more pointed—but still respectful: yet when Edwina perceived them, she by her lover's secret advice adopted a cold demeanour. This reserve on her part only heightened Frederick Newton's passion, and piqued his pride. He fell as it were into his own snare; and while thus hovering about the young beauty, became madly enamoured of her. Seeing that there was a difficulty in insinuating himself into her favour and gradually undermining her virtue—which was his original intention—he resolved upon making her an offer of marriage. He was a villain; and he calculated that if they were once engaged to each other, she would fall into his power. At all events, his passion had become stronger than himself; and he determined to go to the extent of matrimony itself rather than lose her.

The frequent visits of Frederick Newton to Southgate's house, had not at first alarmed either Edwina or her lover: they both considered them to be on mere matters of business between him and her father, and that his purposes were far different in endeavouring to ingratiate himself with Mr. Southgate, than what they really were. But when Edwina perceived that she was the object of his attentions, she communicated the circumstance to Shelburne, soliciting his advice; and

it was in carrying out the counsel he gave her, that she adopted the cold deportment towards Frederick Newton. When his attentions increased, she became alarmed: for she saw the growing influence which he had gained with her father. Hitherto she had viewed him with comparative indifference: but she now began seriously to dislike him—while her love towards Shelburne acquired, if possible, an augmented strength.

One evening Edwina and Mark were walking together at about a distance of a mile from the street where they dwelt,—when they suddenly encountered Frederick Newton. The latter was perfectly astounded on beholding Southgate's daughter, not merely in company with Mark Shelburne, but also hanging to his arm with all the familiar confidence of one who loved. The truth flashed to his mind in a moment: but dissembling all he felt, he spoke with an assumed courtesy, and went his way. The lovers were frightened at this occurrence. They did not know that his affability of manner was merely affected, and that the bitterest feelings and darkest passions were raulking in his mind: but they concluded that as a mere matter of conversation, if in no other way, he would be sure to mention to her father that he had encountered her with Mr. Shelburne. How were they to act? Now for the first time it struck the young damsel that she had been doing wrong to maintain these stolen interviews with Mark, and to take so serious a step as that of pledging her hand to him without her sire's concurrence: for with all his faults and failings, he was her father—she was dependent on him—and her conduct now wore the aspect of duplicity and undutifulness. Such were the representations which, in a paroxysm of grief, she made to Shelburne; and he, naturally generous and high-minded, saw that they were deeply imbued with reason and justice. But as his intentions had all along been most honourable—indeed, as no thought to the contrary had ever for an instant entered his mind—he could not very severely blame himself for having encouraged and maintained these clandestine interviews. A knowledge of the worldly-minded, money-loving, coldly-calculating character of Mr. Southgate, had alone prevented Mark Shelburne from calling upon the old man, avowing the love he experienced for his daughter, and beseeching an assent to their engagement. But now there was no alternative than the adoption of this course: and Mark assured Edwina that he would call for that purpose on her father next day. He said that, under existing circumstances, it behoved them both to act with the utmost frankness, whatever the consequences might be; and the young damsel was reassured by her lover's words. They parted with renewed protestations of constancy and undying affection—and returned separately to the dwellings fronting each other.

Immediately after breakfast on the following morning, Mark Shelburne knocked at the door of Mr. Southgate's house. The postman had just delivered some letters,—most of them being replies from persons who owed Mr. Southgate money, and sending excuses for non-payment. To some he had written peremptorily—to others entreatingly: but to all without effect. The fact was that just at this moment an opportunity presented itself for a most favourable investment—at least as old



Southgate thought—of five hundred pounds, and by which a gain of a similar amount was to be made in a short time. He had not the money at command: all his little capital was out in various small loans; and the letters which the postman had just delivered, were fraught with the bitterest disappointment for the rapacious man. It was under such auspices that Mark Shelburne was ushered, by the drab of a servant girl, into the meanly-furnished, sordid-looking little parlour where the old man was seated at a desk, reading his correspondence.

It were indeed difficult for a stranger to be made to believe that this man was the father of so angelic a creature as Edwina. He had not merely the plainest set of features ever seen on the countenance of one of nature's least-favoured sons; but his face had altogether an expression of low vileness—a something so degraded and bad that the effect his look produced was uncomfort-

able to a degree. Mark had never seen him so close before; and though from his window, or from a distance in the street, he had frequently observed that Mr. Southgate had an unfortunate countenance, he did not think it was so excessively repulsive, so mean, and so vile, as he now found it to be. For a few instants a complete damp was thrown upon his spirits: the blood returned cold to his heart: he could not give utterance to a word. But suddenly the image of Edwina (who was not in the room) sprang up before him. *She* was the treasure that he sought—*she* possessed not a single lineament of that repulsive countenance: the bad expression which sat thereon, was reflected not on *her* lovely features. She was an angel; and it was to possess her that he had come, even though he might have to sue for the assent of a demon.

"Well, sir—what is it?" demanded old Southgate, who was more than usually morose and

savage on this particular occasion: then, without waiting for a reply, and without even asking his visitor to be seated, he went on to observe, "Oh, I suppose you are like all the rest of them?—you want a loan? You medical students are uncommon good borrowers—but, with *one* exception, wretched bad payers; and I shall have nothing more to do with any of you. So that's my answer—and there's the door."

"Mr. Southgate," responded Mark, "you have altogether mistaken the purpose of my visit. I never borrow."

"Then what the deuce do you come here for?" demanded the old man, with a snarl. "Not to lend, I'll be bound! If so, you would be a very welcome visitor at this moment. Why, you are a medical student, ain't you?—you live opposite—you have been there for the last two years—I know you by sight well enough. Yes, you are a medical student; and what can a medical student want with me, except to borrow?"

"If you permit me, I will explain myself," responded Mark; "and perhaps you will find that it is for no idle purpose I have come—but on a matter of the gravest importance."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the old man, his curiosity much excited, and his aspect becoming a trifle less sour; for Mark spoke with the utmost courtesy, the image of the lovely Edwina thus influencing his bearing towards her ill-conditioned father.

"I will explain myself, sir, in a few words," he continued; "and I crave your indulgence for the brief space they will occupy. You are aware that I have been your neighbour for two years: I have therefore seen your daughter. One evening, some months back, I had the good fortune to rescue her from insult in the adjacent street. Thus did our acquaintance begin. It grew into friendship: friendship ripened into love. We have met frequently. That we have done so, I alone must be blamed: for it was I who besought and entreated Miss Southgate thus to meet me. But I am not ashamed to look you—her father—in the face, and make this confession; because my intentions have all along been strictly honourable towards your amiable and beauteous daughter. I am now here to unbosom myself frankly and candidly—to avert from her head any displeasure which you may experience on account of our meetings—and to implore your assent to the engagement which subsists between us."

Old Southgate had listened with mingled interest and astonishment to this avowal: but his features showed no more displeasure than the natural acerbity which they ever expressed;—for he thought to himself that this young medical student who came to demand his daughter's hand, must assuredly be conscious of possessing the means to keep a wife; and the old man had no objection to see his daughter married under such circumstances:—there would be one the less to feed and clothe. That all these things were passing in his mind, Mark Shelburne read plainly enough by his countenance; and thus had he been more or less encouraged to proceed until the end of his speech.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Southgate, "there is no harm in an honest man seeking a wife when he knows he can maintain one. Of course this is your case?"

"Candidly and frankly speaking," answered

Mark, "I am unable at present to maintain a wife: but I have every prospect of succeeding in the profession on which at the expiration of another year I shall enter."

"And what justifies you in being so sanguine?" demanded Southgate, treating the whole affair in a perfectly business-like point of view.

"In the first place, I am assiduous in respect to my studies," replied Mark, with a proud confidence perfectly justifiable under the circumstances; "and I may without vanity proclaim that I have not thrown away my time. Secondly, I have an uncle who generously supplies me with the means of prosecuting those studies, and who has given me to understand that when my term of probation is passed, the funds will not be wanting to enable me to commence practice in a modest though sufficient style. In the third place, I have certain hopes of arriving at the most extraordinary discoveries in physiological science, but to which I need not farther allude at present."

Gradually as he spoke, Mark observed that a cloud gathered over Mr. Southgate's countenance,—evidently showing that the old man was but little satisfied with these explanations. He appeared to reflect for a few moments when Mark had done speaking; and then he said, with a look full of vile cunning and keen slyness, "Do you then love my daughter so very much?"

"I do! I do!" exclaimed Mark, with a gush of all his characteristic enthusiasm; and his naturally pale countenance became animated with a reflection of the feelings that glowed in his heart. "Yes, sir—I adore her!—there is no sacrifice which man can make that I am not prepared to make on her behalf! I beseech you, sir, not to stamp her unhappiness and mine by a refusal—Oh, I beseech you, do not!"

"These are very fine words, Mr. Shelburne—for such I know to be your name," responded Southgate, with a smile of sardonic contempt at the young lover's impassioned ejaculations: "but they do not satisfy me with you as a suitor for my daughter's hand. Now, look you—I treat everything as a matter of business. Here"—and he displayed the pile of letters which he had been opening—"are a lot of excuses and apologies, all lies in their way, for not paying me certain monies that I have lent, and the return of which I most particularly want at this present moment, or at least within a week. In short, I *must* get five hundred pounds somewhere or another; and to such a strait am I reduced, that if you could only accommodate me in this way, I would say *yes* to your suit in less than a minute. There now!—that is plain English. You have got an uncle, you say, who can raise a little money if he likes: you know best whether he will assist you in the present instance."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mark Shelburne, with a fresh gush of enthusiasm, "if this be the only condition, most cheerfully do I accept it! And I thank you, Mr. Southgate—sincerely thank you," he said, grasping the hand of the old man, whose sordid worldly-mindedness and cold-blooded meanness in thus actually selling his daughter he lost sight of at the moment in the joy which filled his heart in having succeeded in his cherished aim.

"Well, it is an understanding, then," resumed the old man. "Let me see. This is Monday: I

shall want the money by next Monday at twelve o'clock;—and in the meantime you will please to keep away from the house; for I don't choose to acknowledge you as my daughter's suitor until the condition is complied with."

"You have but to express your will, and it shall be obeyed," responded Mark. "But may I not say a few words with Miss Southgate before I leave the house? I am so anxious to tell her that you have not refused my entreaty."

"Well, well—just for a few minutes—I have no objection. You will find her in the little parlour behind this."

Mark lost not another moment in proceeding to the room thus indicated; and there he found the young maiden endeavouring to occupy herself with needlework, but in reality a prey to the most violent agitation and painful suspense of feeling. When however Mark hurried in with joy upon his countenance, and catching her in his arms, strained her to his breast, she knew full well that his suit with her father had been successful. But when the first ebullition of gladness had found vent, Mr. Shelburne was suddenly smitten with the gross indelicacy and grovelling worldly-mindedness which old Southgate had displayed; and such was the disgust he suddenly experienced towards the father, that Edwina noticed his altering mien, and grew alarmed. He saw that she had perceived something strange about him; and as his affection was in no way changed towards herself, he being too generous-hearted to hold her responsible for her parent's actions,—he again folded her in his arms, and said everything endearing and tender he could think of. She however, convinced there was something that he still kept from her, pressed him to tell her everything; but he endeavoured at first to evade the subject. Then it occurred to him that Mr. Southgate, in that embroiled callousness which belonged to his mercenary disposition, would be sure to tell Edwina of the compact that had been formed; and so he resolved upon at once breaking it to her himself,—inasmuch as he felt he could do so with much greater delicacy than her father was likely to exhibit. He accordingly explained to Edwina all that had occurred,—but frequently interrupting his narrative to beg the young damsel not to be agitated, and to assure her that it made not the slightest difference in the feelings he entertained towards her. Despite however of all this kind consideration and endearing conduct on the part of her lover, Edwina was cruelly mortified and humiliated at what she heard: she burst into tears—and sobbing passionately, wrung her hands,—exclaiming, "No, no, Mark—I never can consent to become your's on such conditions! I feel as if I were being sold and bought! Oh, that my father could have done this!"

Shelburne was in one sense much afflicted at the effect thus produced upon the young damsel by the revelation he had made: but in another sense he was gratified,—inasmuch as her grief proved to him how totally different her mind and disposition were, in purity of thought and delicacy of feeling, from the grovelling baseness and paltry meanness of her father. Again he pressed her in his arms: he said all he could to console her: he represented that they must take her father as he was, and not as they could wish him to be;—he assured her that he had considered it fortunate

the old man had assented to his suit at all; and he begged Edwina to comprehend that she would only be stamping the unhappiness of both, if she allowed her feelings of delicacy and her scruples to become a new barrier to the fair progress of their love, the most important one having been removed. It was not exceedingly difficult for a young man who loved devotedly, to cheer the spirits of a young maiden by whom he was beloved tenderly; and as he had no doubt that his kind uncle would by some means raise the money requisite to insure his happiness, he besought Edwina to smile again, and look as much as possible on the bright side of the picture and as little as she could on the dark side. Besides, he urged that when once they were married, everything that he might possess would be in common between them—that it was merely a loan to her father taken by anticipation from a stock hereafter to be common to both—and that if it should enable him to reap considerable returns and pave the way towards the attainment of that fortune to which he had long aspired, whatsoever money he amassed must at his death come to Edwina. By these, and other delicately ingenious representations of the same sort, Mark Shelburne reassured and cheered Edwina once again; and they separated with joy in their hearts and renewed protestations of devoted love.

A few minutes after Mark Shelburne had left the house, Frederick Newton called there. He had not observed, nor indeed suspected, that Shelburne had presented himself at the Southgates' abode: for he had been up the greater part of the night at some house of dissipation at the West End, and had only just risen from his bed after a few hours of feverish rest. But by means of copious ablutions, soda-water, and a well-studied toilet, he had obliterated the traces of the orgie, and appeared as fresh as if he had kept proper hours and had enjoyed an adequate amount of repose. On knocking at the door of Southgate's house, Frederick Newton was at once admitted into the old man's presence; and he began by stating that he had something very important to communicate.

"The fact is," he went on to say, "I had a call to make last evening near Kennington, and whom should I suddenly run against, but Miss Edwina leaning on the arm of the young man who occupies lodgings in the same house as myself?"

"Well, I know it all," responded Southgate, somewhat surlily.

"You know it all?" ejaculated Frederick. "Why! what do you mean? You surely cannot regard with pleasure——"

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Newton," interrupted Southgate, "I have no time this forenoon for idle discourse. Mr. Shelburne has offered my daughter his hand; and I have accepted him—that is to say," he slowly added, "on certain conditions."

"Accepted! on certain conditions!" ejaculated Newton, astonishment for the moment triumphing over jealous rage and envious spite.

"Yes—to be sure; and why not? I suppose Edwina must look out for a husband as well as any other young woman."

"Oh, certainly!" cried Newton: "but I certainly thought, Mr. Southgate, that when you did

choose a husband for your daughter, he would be a respectable character."

"Respectable?" said the old man, with a sort of sneer: "and why is not Mark Shelburne respectable? He attends to his studies—keeps good hours——"

"But he has not a shilling—he is dependent on an uncle who is himself poor——"

"All I can tell you is," answered Southgate, "that Mark Shelburne is to bring me five hundred pounds by this day week at twelve o'clock; and if he keeps his word, I shall not ask him how he got the money—but he may have my daughter and welcome. Indeed the sooner she is provided for, the better."

"Mr. Southgate," said Frederick Newton, becoming violently agitated, "surely you must have seen that I myself had not beheld your daughter with indifference? surely you must have perceived the delicate attentions I have endeavoured to pay her? I did think you had a good opinion of me, and that I had some little claim upon your consideration——"

"What the deuce is all this about?" said the old man, unfeignedly astonished. "How could I tell that you had any serious intentions about my daughter? why didn't you speak out? I never fancied such a thing. But however, it is all the same if I had: for I *must* have this five hundred pounds, and I don't suppose you could have raised it."

"Ah, if I had the chance!" ejaculated Frederick, goaded almost to desperation. "Yes—my happiness depends upon your beautiful daughter! I love her—I adore her—I feel that I cannot live without her! You know that I am steady in my habits—regular in my conduct—punctual, and I hope liberal in my dealings——"

"Well, I do know all this," answered Southgate; "and if you had spoken to me first, I should have told you just what I have told Mark Shelburne."

"And if I can procure five hundred pounds by the time you have specified?" exclaimed Frederick eagerly.

Doubtless old Southgate thought it would be as well to have two strings to his bow; and therefore he answered, "Well, whoever comes first of you two young men next Monday with the five hundred pounds, shall have Edwina as a wife. But you had better not tell anything of all this to Mr. Shelburne——"

"No, no—it is not necessary," interrupted Frederick. "Supposing, however," he immediately added, "that we come together, and each provided with the amount—how will you decide?"

"Well, really in that case," responded the old man, "it would be necessary to leave it to Edwina herself: but of course I should throw all my influence into the scale on your behalf—because I know more of you than I do of Mr. Shelburne; and I think you are a good kind of a fellow."

Newton expressed his thanks for this assurance, and took his leave without asking or endeavouring to see Edwina.

CHAPTER CLXX.

THE UNCLE.

THE policy which Frederick Newton now adopted, was of the most cunning description. From Southgate's house he went straight over to that in which he lived; and ascending to Mark Shelburne's sitting-room, entered with the most affable demeanour. Affecting to jest at the circumstance of having met him on the preceding evening in the company of Miss Southgate, he assured Mark he should not think of mentioning the circumstance to the old man, as he was incapable of doing anything so unhandsome. He pretended to feel the greatest possible interest on behalf of Mr. Shelburne's love for Edwina—and expressed a hope that all would go on smoothly, and that their marriage would be crowned with prosperity. Mark had never liked Frederick Newton: he knew him to be secretly dissipated, though outwardly assuming a most hypocritical steadiness of demeanour, bordering even upon sanctimoniousness;—and he mistrusted such a character. But there now appeared something so frank and open-hearted—something so unusually candid and generous, in Frederick Newton's conduct and language, that Shelburne was thrown completely off his guard; and he accepted his fellow student's behaviour as the overture of a friendship which had not as yet existed between them. He did not however tell Newton what was the compact which Mr. Southgate had made: he did not choose to humiliate Edwina by publishing the grovelling baseness of her father. But he did mention that he should write by that day's post to his uncle Mr. Shelburne in the country, to ask his consent to his engagement with Miss Southgate: whereupon Frederick expressed himself most anxious to hear the result,—which Mark accordingly promised should be duly communicated to him. The reader will of course understand that Frederick Newton was thus astutely endeavouring to lay a train whereby he might discover whether Mark would become possessed of the requisite sum or not: for he comprehended full well that it was not merely the uncle's consent which was to be written for, but likewise the pecuniary aid, and that it would therefore be useless to send the former without the latter: so that if in the course of a few days Mark should inform him that he had received his uncle's concurrence, it would be the same as saying that his uncle had remitted the money.

Frederick Newton himself had not the slightest chance of procuring the sum which could alone win him old Southgate's daughter. His father, having become a widower, had married again, and had a young family by his second wife,—Frederick being the only issue of the first. Mr. Newton, senior, was a merchant at Liverpool,—tolerably well off—stern in his disposition—and only allowing his son just sufficient to pursue his medical studies and live respectably, if he chose to do so. As for providing him with five hundred pounds without a most sufficient reason,—and as for furnishing him such a sum to enable him to marry a portionless girl,—old Mr. Newton would have proved equally inaccessible to either request. This Frederick well knew; and he did not therefore pur-

pose to apply to his father: nor had he any friend or relation to whom he could address himself for such a loan. Why, then, had he for a moment thought of offering himself as a competitor with Mark Shelburne for the hand of Mr. Southgate's daughter? It was in a moment of desperation that he did so: he was goaded almost to madness at the idea of losing Edwina, and seeing her bestow her hand upon a hated rival. Thus, without any settled plan—without indeed having the slightest idea at the moment of what he should do, or what he should even attempt—he had thrown himself as it were upon the chapter of accidents: he had flung himself on the stream of chances in the wild hope that something might yet turn up to baffle his rival and crown his own aspirations with success. For, as the reader has already seen, he had become so passionately enamoured of the lovely Edwina that he had only said the truth when declaring that he could not possibly live without her.

How, if he did marry Edwina, he was to maintain a wife—how he was to reconcile his father to such a match—or how he was to avoid being discarded altogether by a parent who since his second marriage had shown but little affection for him,—these were considerations which did not for an instant enter the head of Frederick Newton. Intent only upon gratifying his inclinations for the present, he troubled himself not for the future: a thorough profligate, he was equally reckless: completely unprincipled, he would not hesitate to seal the unhappiness of a young and beautiful girl, so long as he could minister to the passing whim of the moment or the absorbing passion of the hour. Thus he had no settled plan when engaging himself with old Southgate as a competitor for Edwina: his only hope was that by preventing Mark from succeeding, the arena would still remain open for himself. To discover therefore how Shelburne's affairs might progress, he had endeavoured to worm himself into his confidence: and after the interview just described, he chuckled inwardly at having gained one point—namely, the certainty of being informed in due course what response Mr. Shelburne senior would give to his nephew's appeal.

Mark failed not to write to his uncle, earnestly representing that his happiness was so completely at stake, that all his energies in the prosecution of his studies would be paralyzed and crushed if Mr. Shelburne senior failed to befriend him now. He went on to observe that he knew his uncle was not rich, and that he had already done more for his nephew than he could well afford: but he besought him to make this one effort to ensure his felicity,—declaring that a whole lifetime of gratitude would be given in repayment—and that, to descend to more worldly-minded considerations, he was sanguine of success and of accompanying fortune when once fairly launched in his profession,—so that he had no doubt of being eventually enabled to refund all that his uncle was so generously expending or might yet expend for his advancement. This letter, which was written in a manly but earnest and enthusiastic style, was shown by Mark to my brother William,—to whom he likewise communicated more in detail than was described in that letter, what had taken place between himself and old Southgate: for so intimate were my brother and Shelburne, that they had no secrets from each

other. The letter was despatched to the post; and William considered this to be a most favourable opportunity to renew his expostulations with Mark against the use of opium. He represented, in as delicate terms as possible, how shocked Edwina would be if she learnt that he to whom she had promised her hand, had contracted so pernicious a habit—how unjust it was of Mark thus to think of marrying one to whom he had not the courage to reveal his failing—and how it was calculated to embitter the future years of his life if he persevered in it, inasmuch as he must either confess this weakness after his marriage, or else pursue it secretly, with the constant chance of its being discovered. Mark was profoundly touched by these representations; and after some few minutes' reflection, he seized my brother by the hand, vowing and protesting that he would abandon the habit as speedily as possible. It was one that could not be thrown off suddenly and all in an instant: but Mark pledged himself to diminish the doses materially on each occasion,—calculating that by the expiration of a week or ten days he might break himself of the pernicious use of the drug altogether. William was much delighted with the success of his remonstrances on this occasion; and proffered his sincerest congratulations on the resolve to which his friend had come.

The determination was at first faithfully kept,—notwithstanding the excitement of suspense which Mark Shelburne was now destined to endure. But then, perhaps, the excitement itself, although gradually becoming more painful—as will be immediately explained—served to a certain degree instead of the artificial stimulant. It is however a fact that day after day the young man diminished his doses, at even a greater ratio than he himself had expected to be able to accomplish. Every evening he met his beloved Edwina: their interviews were now no longer stolen; and though they did not take place at her father's house, and were limited to a walk in the neighbourhood, yet still the lovers had not the apprehension of being observed by any one who might report the proceeding to the old man: for Edwina on each occasion frankly told her father that she was going to meet her admirer. Nor did Mr. Southgate object: he probably deemed it most prudent to suffer the lovers thus to encounter each other, so that Mark's passion might be sustained, and there should be no danger of a falling away from his agreement. Frederick Newton ascended two or three times each day to Mark's rooms, and continued to manifest the warmest friendship as well as the utmost concern in his behalf: so that when Shelburne reflected that Frederick had himself paid some attentions to Edwina, he could not sufficiently admire what thus appeared to him to be his perfectly unselfish and disinterested conduct. For Mark—himself so thoroughly right-minded—naturally concluded that Frederick, on perceiving his own attentions to be rejected, had magnanimously abandoned every hope in that quarter, and that he was likewise generous enough not to regard as a rival Edwina's successful suitor. My brother William had his doubts as to Frederick Newton's straightforward purposes: but still, as he at the time knew nothing to warrant any suspicion, he did not think himself justified in making his friend Mark uneasy by hinting thereat. He was moreover fearful of ac-

cusing Frederick wrongfully; and so he held his peace upon the subject.

But as day by day thus slipped past, no response was received from Mr. Shelburne senior. It was on the Monday that Mark had written; and the Wednesday morning's post should have brought him his uncle's reply. But it did not: and he therefore concluded that his relative was either absent from home all day Tuesday, or that he was taking some little time to reflect upon the matter. But Thursday morning's post brought no answer; and Mark, becoming very uneasy, resolved to write again: for he thought that his first letter must have miscarried. To this second epistle he could not receive a reply till Saturday morning; and when that Saturday morning came, there was still no answer:—the postman passed by the house without leaving any letter. Mark knew not what to think, and was at first resolved to set off without delay and see his uncle: but William dissuaded him from this purpose,—representing that it was very probable Mr. Shelburne senior might have the intention of coming up to town himself to make the personal acquaintance of Miss Southgate before he gave his consent to his nephew's marriage with her. Frederick Newton, who eagerly watched every morning for the arrival of the postman, was totally at a loss what to think; and while he affected to sympathize with Shelburne, and also pretended to be most solicitous in cheering him, he was in his heart greatly rejoiced at the uncle's continued silence.

Saturday passed away; and no Mr. Shelburne senior made his appearance. Mark was cruelly excited: but when Sunday morning came, he received a parcel, which had been sent up by the night-coach from the country town where the uncle resided. Tearing it open, he found that it contained a rapidly but kindly written note,—to the effect that Mr. Shelburne senior had been absent on a visit to a friend the whole week—that he had only returned home that evening (the Saturday when the note was written)—but that he would be in London on the following evening (Sunday). Mark's suspense and anxiety were now turned into enthusiastic hope and joy: he felt assured, from the tenour of his uncle's letter, that all would be right; and he lost no time in enclosing it in an envelope and sending it across to Edwina, whose suspense had throughout the week been as great as his own. William, who had visited him early on this Sunday morning, offered him his congratulations at what he also felt assured was a very favourable change in the aspect of affairs; and soon after the delivery of the parcel, Frederick Newton ascended to Mark's rooms. To his inquiry whether there were any intelligence, Mark replied that he had received a note from his uncle, who would be in London in the evening: but on this occasion, as well as on all former ones when the subject was touched upon by Newton, Shelburne said nothing of the money-compact entered into with Mr. Southgate. Little indeed did he suspect that Frederick Newton was all the while perfectly well acquainted therewith!

The note had intimated that Mr. Shelburne senior would take up his abode at his nephew's lodging, if a bed could be provided for him: and Mark decided upon giving up his own chamber to

his uncle,—an attic on the highest storey being vacant, and in which the landlady of the dwelling offered to accommodate him. That day was one of renewed excitement for the medical student: but it was also full of hope and confidence;—and Mark insisted that William should be with him in the evening to partake of supper and be introduced to his uncle. My brother would have excused himself, thinking it better that the old gentleman and his nephew should meet alone in the first instance: but Mark, feeling somewhat timid as the hour drew near, so earnestly entreated William to remain, that he consented to do so. As a matter of course the same invitation was not extended to Frederick Newton,—whose behaviour, be it observed, nevertheless continued to wear that same friendly aspect which throughout the week it had borne.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening that the uncle alighted from a cab at the house where his nephew lodged; and he was received upon the threshold by Mark himself, who ran down the instant that from the window he observed the vehicle stop. He escorted Mr. Shelburne senior up-stairs to his sitting-room, where he introduced him to my brother William. He was a gentleman past sixty years of age—short and thin, with a somewhat emaciated and enfeebled frame—but with a remarkable mildness and benevolence of countenance. Nevertheless, he was a man who would not be led away by his kind feelings to consent to anything which was repugnant to his sense of propriety, or at variance with a prudential course of action. He greeted his nephew affectionately; and shook hands warmly with my brother as his nephew's friend,—observing that Mark in his letters had frequently spoken in the highest terms of William Price, with whom he was therefore happy thus to make acquaintance. The old gentleman, being much fatigued after his journey, took some refreshment before he said a word upon the business which had brought him to London; and during this interval Mark could scarcely conceal the suspense which he was enduring. At length Mr. Shelburne senior, by a few words he let drop, showed that he was now prepared to touch upon that momentous topic;—whereupon William rose and offered to withdraw.

"No," said the uncle, "it is not necessary. From what my nephew has remarked to me in his letters, I am well aware that you are acquainted with all his secrets; and as you are his bosom-friend, it will be as well that you should listen to what I have to say: for you can judge dispassionately and disinterestedly in the matter, and you will be enabled to pronounce whether I take a proper view of the subject, and whether the proposal I have to make is the one best suited to ensure my nephew's happiness."

William accordingly remained; and Mr. Shelburne senior went on to speak in the following manner:—

"I much regret that I was from home, Mark, when your first and also your second letter arrived: but as you may have perceived, the moment I returned to my dwelling last evening, I lost no time in despatching you a note by coach-parcel, so that you might receive it the first thing this morning, and thus have the assurance that it was not through

displeasure I had remained silent. No, my dear Mark—I am not angry with you: I am anxious for your welfare, and will make any sacrifice for the purpose of forwarding it. The best proof is that I have brought with me the sum of money which you have mentioned in your letters. I have it about me in bank-notes, in my pocket-book; and fortunately it has put me not to the slightest inconvenience to obtain it,—inasmuch as through the medium of the friend with whom I have been staying, and who is a highly respectable solicitor, I have just recovered some six or seven hundred pounds which had long been owing to me, but the payment of which was by a variety of circumstances delayed. Thus you see, my dear Mark, I have every inclination to forward your views and ensure your happiness. But I must first be convinced that it is for your happiness that I should assent to this engagement with Miss Southgate, and furnish the means to render her father likewise agreeable. You will not think what I am going to say indelicate or unkind: but you cannot be surprised if I feel considerably shocked at the very outset at the idea of a father thus bargaining, as it were, for the sale of his daughter, although it be to make her a wife. It gives me the meanest and lowest opinion of him—and necessarily so. And now, what I am about to say may pain you; but it must be spoken. It is this—that entertaining such sentiments with regard to the sire, it seems to me somewhat difficult for the daughter to be so completely worthy of your honest affection as you have described her in your letters. Do not interrupt me, Mark: I can anticipate what you would say. I know your enthusiastic nature—I know too that it is as generous as it is enthusiastic—and I know likewise that love blinds the eyes of even the most wary and cautious, and therefore has far greater influence in this respect with one who is himself ingenuous and unsuspecting. It may be that Miss Southgate is as different from her father as the sunny climes of the tropics are different from the glacial horrors of the Arctic regions:—and she had need to be so for me to hold her worthy of becoming my niece. You, I believe, Mr. Price, from what Mark has told me in his letters, are unacquainted with this young lady?"

"I am," responded my brother: "but I have seen her often; and if ever an angelic innocence of mind were indicated by the countenance, then is Miss Southgate assuredly all that my friend Mark has represented her to be."

"Very likely—and I sincerely hope that it is so for his sake," continued Mr. Shelburne senior. "I am not one who would sternly enjoin my nephew to marry only for wealth: nor am I one who would visit upon the daughter the consequences of her father's faults and failings. But there is so much hypocrisy in the world that it is impossible to know how far persons may be playing a studied part. I have therefore made up my mind how to act. To-morrow morning I will call upon Mr. Southgate; and on being introduced to him, shall request that his daughter may be present at our interview. I shall then proceed to state that being totally unable to provide the sum which Mr. Southgate requires, I am compelled on my nephew's behalf to throw myself upon his mercy: or in other words, that inasmuch as my nephew is deeply attached to his daughter, I hope he will

permit the engagement still to hold good. As a matter of course I know what *his* answer will be: but it is upon the young lady I wish to observe the effect of the venial falsehood I shall thus be telling. If, having secretly entered into her father's views, she is playing a part, her duplicity will at once transpire: but if, on the other hand, she be sincerely attached to *you*, Mark, her affection will likewise manifest itself in uncontrollable emotions. Should this latter alternative prove the case, I will at once welcome her as my future niece—I will hand her sordid father the sum for which he stipulates—and I shall long for the time to come when by means of marriage you may emancipate such a good girl from the authority and companionship of such a bad parent. Now, do you consent that I should put your Edwina to this test?"

"I do, I do, my dear uncle!" exclaimed Mark, overjoyed at the proposition: for he had not the slightest doubt as to what the result would be. "Oh! if Edwina were selfish in the love she has professed for me, I should long ago have discovered it. Why should she have met me in secret? why should she have kept that love of her's unknown to her father? why—"

"My dear nephew," interrupted Mr. Shelburne, "we will not argue the subject. You have consented to the proposition which I have made: you are satisfied to abide by the result—and so am I. Let us therefore say no more. In a few hours, either your happiness will be confirmed—or you will have to congratulate yourself on a narrow escape from a most insidious snare."

It was now past ten o'clock; and the uncle being anxious to retire to rest, my brother William took his leave. Shortly afterwards the old gentleman was shown to the room prepared for him, and which was behind that where this scene took place. Mark, having embraced him and again thanked him for all his kindness, ascended to the attic where he was to pass the night. But about half-an-hour after Mark had thus retired, a knock was heard at the front door of the house; and the landlady, having answered it, ascended to the attic to inform the young medical student that a person who refused to give any name, wished to speak to him immediately. Mark did not choose to have the individual up into his own sitting-room, for fear that his uncle might be disturbed, inasmuch as the bed-chamber opened from that sitting-room, and whatsoever took place in one could be overheard in another. His uncle was very much fatigued with his day's journey; and therefore was the nephew so considerate on his relative's account. He accordingly requested the landlady to show the stranger, whoever he might be, into her own parlour on the ground-floor; and he would descend in a few moments, for he was partially undressed. The landlady did as he required: Mark speedily went down stairs—and the interview between himself and that stranger lasted for about ten minutes. The landlady, who was in another room, then heard Mark Shelburne let the stranger out of the front door; and immediately afterwards he re-ascended to the attic. But as she came out of the room where she had been remaining, she distinctly heard him say in a tone which struck her to be strange and wild, although it was low—for he evidently spoke as if musing audibly—"Then happen what will, it shall be done!"

The night passed—morning dawned—and at about seven o'clock Mark, who was up betimes, came down stairs to call the servant of the house to bring him some hot water, as there was no bell-pull in the attic where he had slept. The landlady, who had already risen, happened to meet him in the passage; and it struck her that there was a strange excitement in his looks—stranger than any expression she had ever before seen upon his countenance. Then the words to which she had heard him give musing utterance on the preceding evening, came back to her mind; and she was about to ask him if anything unpleasant had occurred,—when she thought better of it; and fearing to seem inquisitive and give offence to a good lodger, she turned away, merely wishing him "Good morning." The servant carried him up the hot water; and he bade her fetch another jug, take it to the door of the room where his uncle slept, and knock,—as he knew that his relative wished to be called somewhat early. The domestic proceeded to obey this mandate. She fetched the hot water—she carried it up to the door of the chamber—and she knocked: but no answer was returned. She knocked again, somewhat more loudly: still no answer. Thinking that Mr. Shelburne senior still slept, and fearful of doing wrong if she disturbed him, she was going down stairs,—when Mark, leaning over the banisters on the floor above, bade her knock again, or else take the water into the chamber,—repeating that his uncle had expressly desired to be called at seven o'clock. The servant-girl accordingly knocked once more: and, still as no answer was returned, she gently opened the door of the apartment.

But, heavens! what a wild cry, or rather terrific scream, now rang through that lodging-house!—and this was almost instantaneously followed by the sound of some one falling heavily. Mark Shelburne rushed down the stairs from the attic—Frederick Newton, only half-dressed (he having but just risen) sprang up the stairs from the first-floor which he occupied—and the landlady, likewise alarmed, sped up from the ground-floor. But Mark was the first to reach the chamber: and there what a horrifying, appalling spectacle met his eyes! His uncle lay with the throat frightfully cut; and the bed-clothes were saturated with blood. The servant-girl had fallen in a swoon upon the carpet. Mark gave one wild cry, and also fell senseless upon the floor. Frederick Newton was the next who rushed into the room: the landlady was but a few moments behind him; and as the dreadful sight burst upon the woman's view, she instantaneously exclaimed, "Good heavens, he has murdered his uncle!"

The maid-servant was speedily recovered from the fit into which she had fallen; and the landlady then ran out to fetch a surgeon and summon the police. Meanwhile Frederick Newton and the servant dragged the still inanimate form of Mark Shelburne into the adjacent sitting-room, and applied restoratives—but without effect: he gave no sign of life—and they began to think that the vital spark had fled. A surgeon from the neighbourhood was soon upon the spot; and he at once examined the condition of the uncle. He found that life was not extinct—and without delay began to sew up the ghastly wound in the throat. The landlady returned with a couple of officers; and while one of them remained in the room where attempts

were still being made to bring Mark Shelburne back to consciousness, the other proceeded to make an investigation of the chamber in which the foul deed had been done. The uncle's pocket-book was lying on the floor: it had evidently been rifled—for some of the papers were scattered about; and whatsoever money it might have contained, was gone. The officer, on a hint from the landlady, ascended to the attic in which Mark Shelburne had slept; and there, in a drawer, he found a number of Bank-of-England notes rolled up. On counting them he discovered that they constituted the sum of five hundred pounds. The landlady had already told the constables, as she came along with them, of the mysterious words she had overheard Mark Shelburne utter while ascending the stairs after his interview with the stranger who gave no name; and she likewise spoke of his singular expression of countenance when she had first seen him on this particular morning. The manner, too, in which he had sent the servant-girl to call his uncle seemed full of suspicion; and now the finding of this large sum of money appeared to corroborate all the worst misgivings in respect to the nephew.

It was in the midst of the terrific excitement and confusion which thus reigned at the lodging-house that my brother William arrived: for he was invited to an early breakfast there. He was awfully shocked on hearing what had taken place, and for the first few moments was confounded at the overwhelming weight of suspicion which had fallen upon the head of his friend. But when he regained the power of deliberate reflection, he loudly proclaimed his conviction that Mark Shelburne was incapable of such a deed. The officers shook their heads incredulously: the surgeon was still engaged in doing his best for Mr. Shelburne senior, though he held out but little hope of this unfortunate gentleman's recovery; and Frederick Newton, assisted by the servant-girl, was continuing to administer restoratives to the nephew, who remained in a state of unconsciousness. Meanwhile the rumour of the diabolical deed had spread like wildfire throughout the neighbourhood: a crowd was fast gathering in front of the house, and the tidings failed not to reach the ears of Edwina and her father. The young maiden was half-frantic at the dreadful charge imputed to her lover, of whose innocence she was even more strongly convinced than my brother William. Impelled only by the strength of her feelings—and regardless of the painful notice which she was attracting by her conduct—she rushed forth from her father's house; and ascending to the room where Mark Shelburne still lay in a state of unconsciousness, she threw herself upon her knees by his side, giving vent to the wildest and most passionate ejaculations of grief, intermingled with vehement avowments of his innocence. He now began slowly to recover: but on opening his eyes, gazed around with a vacancy which showed that he did not recognise any one near him—no, not even his well-beloved!

"O Mark! Mark! tell them that you are innocent! tell them that you did not do it!" exclaimed Edwina, throwing her arms about his neck: and then she also fainted. In this state of unconsciousness she was borne back, by my brother William and the landlady, to her father's house;



and when she recovered, it was only to burst forth into fresh paroxysms of distracted grief.

Meanwhile Mark Shelburne, having—as already stated—partially recovered, still continued to gaze around him in a kind of stupor, as if all his faculties were paralyzed, and he was stunned, confounded, and crushed by a sense of something dreadful, but of which he only had a vague and undefined comprehension. In this condition he was conducted by the officers to a hackney-coach fetched for the purpose, and was conveyed to the police-court of Union Hall, where he was locked up in a cell until the magistrate should arrive to take his seat upon the bench. The officers would not permit my brother William to accompany him thither, as he wished to do; and he therefore remained at the lodging-house to watch the effect of the surgeon's attentions to the wounded Mr. Shelburne. As a matter of course, the unfortunate gentleman had lost a vast quantity of blood; and

from this circumstance the principal danger was to be apprehended—for the wound itself was not mortal. It had evidently been inflicted with a razor, or some other very sharp instrument; the position of the wound showed that the victim must have been lying on his back at the time the murderous deed was done—for the wound was right across the front of the throat; but the jugular veins and carotid arteries had not been severed. The surgeon farther inferred that the old gentleman must have fainted almost immediately after the wound was inflicted; as by this supposition it was alone possible to account for the circumstance of no struggle having taken place, and of the position in which he was found lying: namely, somewhat on his right side—so that he had most probably turned in the first instant of convulsing pain, and then consciousness had abandoned him.

The wound being sewn up, and restorative

medicaments administered as well as circumstances would permit, Mr. Shelburne began to show signs of life: but he opened not his eyes—nor was it possible to conceive that there was even the faintest gleam of consciousness in his mind. Frederick Newton, after Mark Shelburne's departure with the police, appeared most assiduous in assisting the surgeon: but during an interval of these proceedings, he said aside to William, "What a dreadful thing! who would have thought it? I suppose Mark was fearful that his uncle would not give him the five hundred pounds; and being driven to despair, he did this."

My brother was struck with the observation thus made: for he had all along fancied Frederick Newton to be ignorant of the money-compact which old Southgate had formed with Mark. He accordingly said, "How came you to know anything of this subject?"

For a moment it struck him that Frederick Newton looked confused, as if he felt that he had committed an inadvertence: but if it were so, he instantaneously recovered himself—and said, "The truth is, Mr. Southgate told me everything."

William made no farther comment; and in a few minutes left the room. Descending to the landlady's parlour, he found her in conversation with several of her neighbours, who had dropped in to hear her account of the tragedy: for as the reader may suppose, the greatest excitement prevailed at every dwelling in that street. William intimated his desire to have some private conversation with the landlady; and the gossips accordingly withdrew. When alone with her, he inquired whether she had heard any noise during the night—any one moving about the house?—and she assured him that she had not; but then she observed that she slept heavily, and it took a great deal to awake her.

"Do you know," inquired William, "who the person was that came to see young Mr. Shelburne last evening?"

"No," she answered. "He refused to give any name, saying that it was unnecessary. I can't for the life of me think what he could have wanted. Somehow or another I feel convinced that he was an accomplice in the deed that was then to be done; and yet I don't see how it could be, either: for I heard Mr. Shelburne let him out of the front door and bid him good night. I don't think that he could have remained concealed anywhere in the house, and that his going out was a mere pretence: for the moment I heard the front door shut, I came out of the back room and found Mr. Shelburne was alone. He was carrying a chamber candlestick in his hand, and looked strange. Then too I heard him let fall those words which I could not understand at the time, but the dreadful meaning of which is now so fully explained. It is because he made that remark in a sort of musing manner immediately after his interview with the stranger, that I can't get it out of my head but what this person must have had something to do with it."

"And what sort of a man was this stranger?" inquired William, though not having any particular reason for asking the question.

"I saw but little of him," replied the landlady: "for when I answered his knock at the door, I had no light with me. As far as I can judge, he was

quite a respectable person, and dressed in black, with a white cravat. I should know his face again."

William was still completely bewildered: he knew not what to think: the amount of circumstantial evidence against his unfortunate friend, appeared to be overwhelming; and yet the conviction of his innocence was obtaining strength in his mind rather than diminishing. His suspicions certainly did float around some one else—but only dimly and vaguely; and there was no just reason for them to settle definitely and positively there. On leaving the landlady, the idea struck him that he would step across and speak to Mr. Southgate; and this idea was suggested by the brief though not unimportant conversation which had taken place between himself and Frederick Newton upstairs in the chamber where the attempted murder was committed. On knocking at the door of the opposite dwelling, he was at once re-admitted: for he remembered that he had already paid that house a visit on this memorable morning, when assisting the landlady to convey back Edwina thither. He was shown into one of the sordidly furnished parlours, where he was immediately joined by Mr. Southgate.

"You know, perhaps," said William, "that I am a very intimate friend of Mr. Shelburne junior; and I may as well inform you that I am entirely in his confidence. I am therefore acquainted with all that took place between himself and you last Monday, and wherefore his uncle came up to London. It would appear, Mr. Southgate, that you also had made a confidant of Mr. Newton?"

"How do you know? why do you say this?" inquired the old man. "I don't wish to be brought into this ugly business in any way."

"But I think," observed William, "that it is highly probable you will have to give evidence at the police-court presently. No doubt all the facts will transpire: because the police have taken possession of Mr. Shelburne senior's pocket-book and papers, amongst which are the letters which Mark wrote to his uncle beseeching him to furnish the money for which you stipulated. That money the unfortunate gentleman did bring with him——"

"Well," interrupted Southgate, "I have heard that five hundred pounds in Bank-notes were found up in the room where Mark slept. It's an ugly business—a very ugly business!"

"Will you be pleased to tell me," inquired my brother, "wherefore you admitted Mr. Newton to your confidence—and when you did so?—because throughout the past week he has spoken and acted as if totally ignorant of the money-compact altogether. Indeed, he appeared to think that Mr. Shelburne senior had merely been applied to for his assent to his nephew's engagement with Miss Southgate."

"Well, if I am called upon to give evidence," answered the old man, "I shall of course tell the truth. I don't want to get myself into any scrape or trouble——"

"Nor do I see how you can, if you do tell the truth," observed William, thinking Mr. Southgate's remark strange. "But I shall feel obliged if you will inform me of everything that has taken place between Mr. Newton and yourself: because I am going straight hence to engage the services of some eminent barrister for Mark Shelburne: and I should like to be enabled to put the legal

adviser in possession of all facts, even the minutest."

"Well, I don't mind telling you," answered old Southgate, who was nervous and trembling; for he seemed to feel that a considerable degree of odium would attach itself to him in the present transaction, and he doubtless thought that he might ameliorate his own position by making a clean breast of all he knew:—"I don't mind telling you that young Newton bid for my daughter as well as Mark Shelburne; and he *did* give me to understand that he also should be provided with five hundred pounds to-day; so that I promised that the one who came first with the money, should be held as the successful suitor. There now, that's all I know about it; and I have nothing more to say. But what do *you* think, Mr. Price? You look uncommon grave and serious: perhaps you don't fancy that Mark—"

"It is of no consequence at present, Mr. Southgate," interrupted my brother, "what I do think. I am in haste to be gone. But one word more! How is your unhappy daughter?"

"She is up in her own chamber, half wild," responded Southgate. "She was quiet just now for a few minutes; and then as the maid tells me, she was on her knees—praying, I suppose:—and these last words were spoken with a sort of sneer."

William took his departure from the house; and making his way through the crowd which still occupied the street, he entered a hackney-coach and returned into the city to Mr. Appleton's dwelling, where, as the reader will recollect, my brother resided. His object was to inform Mr. Appleton of everything that had occurred, and request his recommendation to some legal adviser who might be considered most competent to take in hand this intricate and mysterious case. But on reaching Mr. Appleton's house, William found some one waiting to see him; and who this individual was, will presently appear.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

THE EXAMINATION.

It was eleven o'clock in the forenoon—the magistrate at Union Hall had disposed of the night charges—and Mark Shelburne was now placed in the dock, accused of a murderous attempt made during the past night upon his uncle. More than three hours had elapsed since he was locked up in a cell adjoining the court; and during this interval he had recovered a certain degree of composure. At all events his mind had regained its equilibrium from the prostrating effects of the awful shock it had received; and he was moreover somewhat cheered—or at least much of his poignant anguish was alleviated—by a communication made to him by the surgeon, who was in attendance, to the effect that his uncle still lived—and that though the hope of his ultimate recovery was excessively faint, nevertheless this hope did exist. Still Mark's feelings must necessarily have been of the most painful description: and that they were so, was fully indicated by his countenance. The court was crowded to excess: but on flinging a hasty glance around, the unhappy prisoner beheld not his friend

William Price, whom he had expected to see there. As he subsequently declared, the idea struck him that my brother believed him to be guilty, and had therefore abandoned him to his fate. Frederick Newton was there—as well as the servant-maid, the landlady, and Mr. Southgate; and it has been already said that the surgeon was likewise in attendance. Soon after the prisoner was placed in the dock, a barrister entered the police-office, and intimated to the magistrate that he had received instructions to watch the case on behalf of the accused: but he did not say by whom he had thus been retained. It nevertheless struck the unfortunate Mark that my brother William had done this; and it was some relief to be allowed to hope that he was not altogether deserted by a friend whom he so much valued.

Mark would have at once addressed the magistrate, to give certain explanations: but he was desired to wait until the witnesses had been examined;—and the barrister engaged for him, likewise bade him remain quiet, and reserve until the proper opportunity whatsoever he might have to say. The servant-maid of the lodging-house was the first witness called; and she deposed to having entered the chamber by the prisoner's reiterated instructions,—when she beheld the occupant lying murdered, as she thought, in the bed; and she fell down in a fit. Frederick Newton was next examined; and he deposed to having been alarmed by the girl's scream; and rushing up to the chamber, was smitten with horror on beholding the same spectacle. He gave his evidence with some degree of emotion; and this was attributed to the circumstance of being compelled thus to appear against a friend. The landlady was the third witness; and she recited those facts which are already known to the reader,—the mysterious visit of the stranger—the words to which she had heard Mark give utterance immediately afterwards—and his singularly excited appearance when he first descended for the hot-water in the morning. Then the surgeon was examined; and after him, the police-officer who had discovered the five hundred pounds in the attic where Mark Shelburne slept. This constable produced the pocket-book picked up in the room where the attempt at murder had been committed; and the two letters which Mark had written to his uncle in the country, respecting his engagement with Edwina and the money-compact with her father, were read aloud by the clerk of the court. These letters produced a great sensation amongst the auditory; and for the time being the heinous crime charged against the prisoner, was almost lost sight of in the feeling of interest inspired by the romantic circumstances of his love, and the manly delicacy as well as fervid enthusiasm with which it was depicted in this correspondence. The reading of the letters likewise made those who heard them, acquainted with the particulars of the money-compact, and thus seemed to form a proper introduction for the examination of Mr. Southgate as the next witness. But at this moment my brother William entered the court, in company with an individual whom both the landlady and Mark Shelburne instantaneously recognised as the stranger who had called at the house on the preceding evening.

"Thank heaven!" murmured Mark, but in tones sufficiently audible to those who stood nearest: for

he perceived in the presence of that stranger a most important witness in respect to the particular matter concerning which he had been so anxious to give explanations the moment he was placed in the dock. William too threw upon him a quick but significant glance, as much as to bid him not despair—and at all events to convince him that my brother did not believe him to be guilty.

At once making his way through the crowd to the place where the barrister was seated, William conferred with him for a few minutes in low whispers; and as the magistrate perceived that something important had transpired, he suspended the examination of old Southgate, who had already entered the witness-box. The barrister penned a few lines on a piece of paper, which he handed up to the magistrate; and when this functionary had read them, he beckoned to an Inspector of Police, who accordingly advanced close up to the bench. The magistrate whispered a few words in the ear of the inspector,—who bowed, and moving away from the bench, took his station near the door of the court. All these proceedings were watched with intense interest by those who understood them not; and amongst them was the prisoner. But he—as he subsequently stated—had the intuitive conviction that whatsoever was going on, was working in his favour.

“I understand,” said the magistrate, “that at this stage of the proceedings there is a gentleman present who has an important statement to make; and I think, under all circumstances, it will be better to hear him at once—for reasons which will perhaps presently transpire.”

Thereupon my brother entered the witness-box; and being duly sworn, he proceeded to depose to the following circumstances:—

“I have been acquainted with the accused Mark Shelburne for some time. We have been intimate friends. Your worship is aware that by this day at twelve o’clock he was to have paid five hundred pounds to Mr. Southgate in a matter closely concerning his happiness. Throughout the past week he has been kept in a state of considerable nervousness and excitement on account of the silence of his uncle, to whom he had applied for the pecuniary succour requisite; and as day after day went by, and the uncle answered not, he began to fear that he was destined to be disappointed. I must now inform your worship that I am fortunate enough to possess a sister in the person of Miss Price Clavering—a young lady of considerable wealth, and who resides on her estate near Canterbury. I am in frequent correspondence with my sister; and from her I have no secrets. I did not therefore consider it to be any breach of confidence towards my friend Mark Shelburne, to narrate in my letters to my sister all the circumstances which so closely regarded him. My sister had written to me to request that I would send her as soon as possible, certain purchases which she desired me to make for her in London. This letter I received on Saturday morning; and having made the purchases, I despatched the parcel by the night-coach on Saturday evening. I availed myself of the opportunity to write my sister a few lines; and as up to that point I had regularly narrated to her everything which regarded my friend Shelburne, I did not forget to mention the cruel state of suspense in which he then found

himself at not having heard from his uncle, and the time for paying the money to Mr. Southgate being so near at hand! The parcel thus sent, and containing this letter, reached Clavering Hall yesterday morning; whereupon my sister at once sent off her steward Mr. Tufnell to London, for a purpose which perhaps he himself had better explain to your worship.”

Here William ceased; and as he descended from the witness-box, he received a look of fervent gratitude from Mark Shelburne. The greatest interest prevailed in the court; and Tufnell, being sworn, spoke as follows:—

“I am steward to Miss Price Clavering, of Clavering Hall, near Canterbury. Yesterday morning, soon after the arrival of a parcel from London, Miss Clavering sent for me into her presence, and desired me to set off for London at once, to execute with as much secrecy and delicacy as possible, a certain commission with which she was about to entrust me. She placed in my hands five hundred pounds in Bank-notes, of all of which I took the precaution to write down the numbers. Miss Clavering commanded me to call at a particular house and inquire for Mr. Mark Shelburne. On obtaining an interview with this gentleman, I was merely to tell him that a person much interested in his behalf, requested him to accept the use of that sum: but I was to mention no name, nor afford the slightest clue to the hand from which this bounty emanated. Miss Clavering would have carried out her views through the medium of her brother, had she not thought that he himself might have some scruples in devoting money to such a purpose,—knowing that it was to fall into the hands of a person whose conduct it is impossible to behold with respect: I mean Mr. Southgate. Nevertheless, I was instructed by Miss Clavering to call upon her brother and tell him what I had done in the matter: for I wish it to be particularly understood that while Miss Clavering entertained a just abhorrence of the sordid meanness and selfish rapacity of Mr. Southgate, she on the other hand deeply sympathized with his daughter, and considered that the bestowal of this sum would have the effect of emancipating that young lady from the authority—I might almost say the contamination—of such a father. Pardon me, your worship,” continued Tufnell, who had warmed with his subject, “for dwelling thus emphatically upon this point of my narrative: but I am desirous that Miss Clavering’s motives should be thoroughly comprehended. To be brief, I arrived in town late last evening; and repaired to the house where Mr. Shelburne dwelt. I saw him: I acquitted myself of my commission; and I must do him the justice to say that it was with the greatest difficulty I could prevail upon him to receive the money. He urged and entreated that I would tell him from whom it came: but this I positively refused, and would not even mention my own name. In this manner I left him,—little dreaming that the well-meant bounty of Miss Price Clavering was destined so soon to serve as a link in the fearful chain of evidence which circumstances have combined against him. This morning I called at the house where Mr. Price dwells; and while I was inquiring for him, he made his appearance.”

Here Tufnell ceased: and Mark Shelburne ex-

claimed with characteristic enthusiasm, "Whatever may be the result of these proceedings, in the presence of all who are assembled here do I proclaim my fervid gratitude towards the sister of my friend for the noble act which she performed through her kind-hearted agent who has just spoken."

There was a murmur of applause in the court; and everybody seemed to feel that the stock of revelations was not yet exhausted, and that fresh developments were to transpire, which would place Mark Shelburne in a different position from that which he still occupied—namely, a prisoner in a dock, charged with a heinous felony.

Tufnell handed to the clerk of the court a list of the numbers of the Bank-notes; and these being compared with those found in the drawer in the attic, proved to correspond precisely.

"May I here be permitted," inquired Mark of the magistrate, "to add a few words of explanation to what has already been said?"—and assent being given, he proceeded as follows:—"The first idea which struck me last night when parting from Mr. Tufnell—whose name was then unknown to me—was that I had now the means of fulfilling my compact with Mr. Southgate on the following day; and having the deepest conviction that his daughter is in every way worthy of a true and honest affection, I resolved that whatsoever opinion my uncle might form upon the subject, I would carry out by my own views—yes, even though I should thereby be rebelling against the will of that most generous and kind-hearted relative! My spirits were elated—my heart was filled with a wild ecstatic joy: it was a sort of intoxication that I experienced;—and my feelings gave themselves audible expression. Hence the involuntary exclamation which caught the landlady's ears—'*Happen what will, it shall be done!*' And now, in respect to that aspect of countenance which, as she alleges, I wore this morning when first descending from my chamber, I have no doubt she has told nothing but the truth; and I readily and sincerely acquit her of any wilful intent to create a prejudice against me. I awoke very early—before five o'clock—and it struck me at the time that some noise in the house, as of a door closing, had thus aroused me: but thinking it might be the servant who was already about, I took no farther notice of the occurrence. I could not now ever compose myself to sleep again; and I know not how it was—but I felt a certain restlessness and uneasiness, as if with a presentiment of impending evil. And now, your worship, I must confess to a particular weakness—a failing—from which however I have been striving to emancipate myself: and that I ever gave way to it, the necessity of making this public avowal is a sufficient punishment. I mean that I have for nearly two years past been addicted to the use of opium. This morning, then, experiencing a wretched depression of spirits for which I could not account, and which seemed almost unnatural under existing circumstances—possessed as I was of the requisite sum to satisfy Mr. Southgate—I could not resist the temptation of recurring to my evil habit. Having during the previous week almost broken myself of it—and having on this last occasion taken a considerable dose—it is no wonder if the effect should have been greater and more striking than usual, and that the expression of my counte-

nance should have been, in the landlady's own words, such as she never beheld it before. I have nothing farther to say at present: unless it be to protest before God and man against the foul charge which has been brought against me!"

When Mark Shelburne had done speaking, there was a fresh murmur of applause in the court,—and which the usher himself did not attempt to repress. The interest of the spectators was wound up to the highest pitch; and when my brother William once more ascended the witness-box, suspense and curiosity were on the very tiptoe.

"I understand from a communication made to me by the learned counsel," said the magistrate, "that you have some farther information to give."

But before my brother could return any answer, a police-officer entered the court, carrying in his hand a small parcel wrapped up in brown paper. He whispered something to the inspector who was stationed near the door; and then he advanced to that enclosed part of the court in which the witness-box stood,—seating himself there, evidently for the purpose of giving some testimony when my brother should have finished the farther evidence that he was about to adduce.

"Now, Mr. Price," said the magistrate, "you can proceed."

"Mr. Tufnell has already informed your worship," began my brother, "that he sought me this morning at the house where I dwell in the city. This was about half-past nine o'clock. After some little conversation, and when I had obtained from a friend of mine—indeed the friend with whom I live—the name of the learned counsel whom it would be desirable to engage for the present case, Mr. Tufnell and I proceeded in a hackney-coach towards that gentleman's chambers. As we passed a banking-house in Fleet Street, I observed a certain individual enter that establishment. I had only recently left him in another place, and was therefore for several reasons struck with amazement—or I should rather say with a certain conviction—on beholding him thus enter that bank. Ordering the vehicle to stop, I watched from a little distance till he came out again; and when he had departed, I entered the bank. I inquired if an individual answering such-and-such a description had just been thither; and was informed that it was so, and that he had come to pay in the sum of five hundred pounds. In reply to farther questions, I ascertained that he had given a fictitious name and address. I likewise procured the numbers of the bank-notes which he thus paid in; and here is the list. On issuing from the bank, I proceeded to the learned counsel's chambers; and then came straight over to this court,—where, previously to entering the justice-hall itself, I deemed it my duty to give certain information to an officer—the one who is now here;" and thus speaking, my brother bent his eyes upon the constable who had so recently entered with the brown-paper parcel.

"Will you state the name," asked the magistrate, though he already knew it—yet for an obvious purpose he made this demand,—“of the individual who paid the money into the bank?”

"Frederick Newton," replied William; and the sensation which this announcement created, was immense,—naturally so indeed, inasmuch as he

whose name was thus mentioned, had been examined as a witness against the prisoner in the dock.

It should here be observed that at the moment when William first began to speak of seeing some one whom he knew enter a bank in Fleet Street, Frederick Newton, turning as pale as death, had made abruptly for the door of the court; but the inspector posted there, sternly remarked, "No one can leave at present." I need hardly observe that the whispered instructions which the magistrate had given to this inspector, were to the effect that Frederick Newton was to be strictly watched, and not to be suffered to leave the court; as from the communication made by the learned counsel on the scrap of paper handed up to the bench, it was probable that Newton would be presently required to stand in another position than that of a witness. When his name was formally mentioned by my brother, the inspector at once laid his hand upon his shoulder,—thereby giving him to understand that he was a prisoner. He was already pale and trembling—but he now shook from head to foot like an aspen-leaf; while his countenance was absolutely ghastly. The inspector conducted him up to the dock; and the magistrate said to Mark Shelburne, "You can stand down, at least for the present:"—but there was something in his manner to imply that he did not think it at all likely he should have to order him back to that ignominious position. Mark, with joyous hope upon his countenance—but at the same time with mingled disgust and horror at even a momentary contact with Frederick Newton—stepped out of the dock; and his hand was instantaneously grasped by my brother William, who whispered in his ear, "You are saved—in a few minutes your innocence will be apparent!" Tufnell likewise whispered a few cheering words; and it was evident that Mark was the object of immense interest and sympathy with the great majority of those present. On the other side, Frederick Newton, seating himself in the dock, buried his face in his hands and sobbed audibly.

The learned counsel now rose; and addressing the clerk of the court, said, "I believe that in the pocket-book, amongst other papers, there is a memorandum of figures—most probably the numbers of the bank-notes which that pocket-book had likewise contained."

The memorandum was produced; and it was found that the numbers exactly corresponded with those which my brother William had obtained at the bank where Frederick Newton paid in the money. This circumstance in itself would have been almost sufficient to fix the crime upon the wretched young man: but there was still stronger evidence to be adduced. This was furnished by the police-officer who had been instructed by William. He proceeded to state that, in consequence of information received from Mr. Price, he had gone to the lodging-house, and had instituted a strict search in Frederick Newton's apartments. He had found a shirt with blood-stains upon it, and on which a razor, or other weapon, had evidently been wiped. He had likewise found a case containing two razors, one of which had marks of blood on the lower part of the blade, close by the place where the rivet attached it to the ivory handle—as if it had only been hurriedly and imperfectly wiped. Inside the handle too there

were blood-marks. The officer opened his parcel, and produced the shirt and the razor, amidst the increased sensation and horrified interest which prevailed in the court.

The magistrate now formally pronounced Mark Shelburne's discharge from custody; and after some complimentary remarks addressed to my brother William for the zeal he had shown on behalf of his friend, he ordered Frederick Newton to be remanded for a week, at the expiration of which time he would be brought up again for the purpose of being committed for trial.

The remaining particulars of this tragic tale may be narrated in a somewhat more rapid manner than the previous incidents. First of all I must observe that the joy of the beauteous Edwina at the manifestation of her lover's innocence, was even greater than the anguish she had felt when first suspicion fixed itself upon him. Old Southgate,—greatly shocked by what had occurred, and unable to blind himself to the fact that it had all arisen from his vile and base cupidity,—was taken dangerously ill in the course of that memorable day, and was compelled to seek his couch. Then did Edwina prove herself to be a daughter whom that bad father was but little worthy to possess; and for several consecutive nights and days she was constant in her watchings by the bed-side. His illness rapidly became more dangerous: the whole system had received a shock which threatened a complete break-up of the constitution. The best medical assistance was called in; and for a short time it appeared as if the old man was rallying and would recover: but a relapse took place—dangerous symptoms set in rapidly—and finding that his end was approaching, Southgate implored that Mark Shelburne and my brother might be sent for, as he wished to speak to them. They hastened to obey the summons. Southgate declared that he was full of remorse, not merely on account of his conduct which had led to so dire a tragedy, but likewise in consequence of many other incidents of his life on which he now looked back with regret and sorrow. He expressed his admiration of the zeal which my brother had shown in bringing about the manifestations of his friend's innocence; and joining the hands of Edwina and Mark, he besought them, when united in matrimonial bonds, to think with leniency upon him who would long before have gone to his last account. He expired in the arms of his weeping daughter; and thus, three weeks after the date of the terrific tragedy, Edwina was an orphan.

It appeared, when her father's affairs were looked into, that she was worth about two thousand pounds; and when William wrote to inform me of Mr. Southgate's death, I immediately sent back to recommend that Edwina should take up her abode with Mrs. Chaplin until the period of mourning had expired and she could become Mark Shelburne's wife. To this proposition the orphan gratefully assented; and I need hardly say that she found a kind friend in the worthy lodging-house keeper of Conduit Street.

The uncle recovered: but he lay for some weeks in a state of unconsciousness; and several months elapsed ere he could leave the chamber in which the dreadful attempt was made upon his life. Finally, however, he regained his strength, and was restored to that nephew whom he loved so well,

and through whom he had been led into those circumstances which had almost proved fatal to him. As for Mark Shelburne, he recorded the most solemn and sacred vows that he would never again have recourse to that pernicious drug which had given him the appearance that so greatly strengthened the suspicion of his guilt; and not many weeks had elapsed after he ceased to use the opium, before he experienced the beneficial effects of such abstinence. His mind settled into a more wholesome condition: gradually did he lose sight of those theories in which he was wont to revel;—and after a while he could afford to laugh at the hypotheses upon the truth and practicability of which he had been wont so gravely and earnestly to insist. His health too improved considerably—the colour came back to his cheeks—and he was in every respect much altered for the better.

And now, with regard to the wretched assassin Frederick Newton. Completely crushed, and overwhelmed by a sense of his dreadful position, he confessed the crime which there was already so much evidence to lay at his door. This confession which he made, was not merely ample, but singularly minute; and it has therefore furnished the ground-work for some portions of this episode which could not otherwise have come to my knowledge. I allude especially to the feelings which inspired him—the motives which animated him—and the treacherous policy which he pursued on several occasions. In respect to the murder itself a few additional details are necessary. It appears that while the uncle, the nephew, and my brother were conversing together on the same evening of the arrival of the first-mentioned gentleman, Frederick Newton crept cautiously and noiselessly up to the door and listened: he thus overheard a considerable part of the discourse, and gleaned the fact that Mr. Shelburne senior had brought with him the five hundred pounds which his nephew required wherewith to propitiate Mr. Southgate. Then was it that the Enemy of Mankind suddenly whispered in Newton's ear; and the idea of committing a horrible crime struck him as if with infernal inspiration. He stole back again to his own apartment: he sat down and reflected. He saw before him the certain means, as he thought, not merely of preventing a hated rival from securing Edwina's hand, but of obtaining that hand for himself. The temptation acquired strength the more he meditated upon it,—till at last the resolve was firmly taken. He remained perfectly quiet in his room for several hours, in order to make the other inmates of the house fancy that he had retired to rest. As the night deepened he prepared to issue forth several times—but his courage failed. At length, as the morning advanced—or rather, long after it had dawned—he felt that he was fully nerved to perpetrate the deed. He stole forth with one of his razors in his hand: he was in a state of almost nudity, having nothing on but his linen, so that in case the blood should gush upon him, it might not betray him by fastening its tell-tale stains upon his clothes. All was quiet. He entered the room where the uncle slept: it was broad daylight, being about five in the morning in the month of August. He drew the razor across the throat of the unfortunate gentleman, who merely gave a quick spasmodic start—turned suddenly on

one side—and fainted in reality—but, as the assassin thought, expired. The pocket-book was found—the bank-notes were abstracted; and then it suddenly struck the criminal that he heard some one moving in the house. Dropping the pocket-book in alarm, he sped back to his own chamber; and doubtless in the horrible confusion of his thoughts, he closed the door somewhat more loudly than was consistent with caution. It was most probably this sound which awakened Mark Shelburne in the attic, as he deposed in the presence of the magistrate.

Such was the substance of the confession made by Frederick Newton to the gaol chaplain. He farther stated that he had paid the money into a bank, through fear of keeping it in his own room or secured about his person, in case suspicion should fall upon him; and that it was his intention to wait a few weeks until he saw the issue of the affair,—when, if all progressed favourably to himself, it was his purpose to seek Edwina's hand in marriage.

The miserable young man's father came not up to London to see his wretched son—but wrote to the chaplain to declare that he could not possibly endure the shock of an interview. Newton's already bitter affliction and poignant anguish were cruelly augmented by this behaviour on his father's part. He sent for Mark Shelburne, who visited him in the condemned cell at Horsemonger Lane Gaol; and falling upon his knees at the feet of Edwina's lover, the wretched young man besought his forgiveness in a paroxysm of the wildest grief. That pardon was not refused. Nay, more—Shelburne assured the miserable culprit that the most active endeavours were being made to procure a commutation of his sentence. These endeavours were successful—it being taken into consideration by the Government that the report of the medical men gave every hope of the ultimate recovery of Mr. Shelburne senior. But Frederick Newton only found his life spared on condition that he should suffer exile in a penal settlement for the remainder of his days.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

THE MARRIAGES.

As the year 1835 drew towards a close, I wrote to Eustace to ask him to undertake a particular commission for me. This was to purchase a handsome house in one of the best quarters of the West End of London, and have it furnished in a suitable style. These arrangements were speedily carried out; and I then—likewise through the assistance of Eustace—effected such a pecuniary arrangement as would give my brother William a thousand a year. I should have increased this sum considerably, but for two reasons. In the first place, I knew that he himself would be displeased were I to place him in a position that would render him altogether independent of his own exertions; and in the second place I was desirous that he should still retain every possible stimulant to the prosecution of the career in which he had embarked, and which I felt sanguine would be successful. It was not till within a short time of the

date fixed for his marriage with Miss Craven, that he was made acquainted with what had thus been done for him. Then Eustace took him to the house—told him it was his own—and likewise placed in his hands the necessary documents making over to him the freehold, as well as the revenue which I had allowed him. But now Lord Wilberton himself performed an action as noble as it was generous.

"My dear William," he said, "when I was in the depth of a dilemma from which I at the time beheld scarcely any means of extrication, your sister devoted the great bulk of the fortune which she then possessed to rescue me from gaol; and I know that it was not merely with your fullest concurrence, but likewise by your assistance that my liberation, when once resolved upon, was so quickly achieved. The sum thus advanced for my use, has never been repaid by me—for the simple reason that, situated as I and your sister are together, it would have been ludicrous as well as coldly formal to refund it. But I have not the less remembered the existence of the obligation; and you must forgive me if I have taken my own way to liquidate it. I have transferred the sum of thirty thousand pounds, in the Bank of England, to the joint trusteeship of our kind friends Mr. Appleton and Henry Crawford,—to be paid to you on the attainment of your thirtieth birthday. The reason that I have adopted this course, is precisely the same which influenced your sister when she made you a settlement of no more than one thousand a year."

William expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the generosity as well as the delicate forethought of Eustace: and more than ever did my brother admire the character and disposition of him who was shortly to become my husband.

In the early part of the month of December of the year of which I am writing, there was again a numerous party at Clavering Hall. My sister Jane, as the reader will recollect, was already with me: the guests who now arrived were the Earl and Countess of Chilstone, and their son Lord Egerton—Mr. and Mrs. Kingston—the Crawfords and Mrs. Summerly—Mr. Appleton and William—and some young ladies dwelling in the neighbourhood of Canterbury, and who were to act as bridesmaids. Eustace came down to Canterbury at the same time: but for obvious reasons he did not take up his quarters at the Hall—he engaged rooms at the *Fountain Hotel*. None of us who had been in mourning wore mourning garments now: they had been put aside some weeks previously; and I remember full well how Jane and I mingled our tears for our departed sister when we thus renounced our sable garments:—for though the emblems of mourning were cast off, yet the feeling still lingered in our hearts.

But I have now to speak of marriages and not of deaths: for it was to celebrate three weddings that the party was assembled at Clavering Hall. It was arranged that the bride of William with Miss Craven and Lord Egerton with Jane should take place at the same time—and mine with Eustace a few days later: for I wished to perform without constraint the duties of a sister to William and Jane, and those of a hostess to the party assembled at the wedding breakfast. It was a happy day, that one which marked those marriages!

Though in the month of December, the sun shone brightly: it was a fine frosty morning, with the air crisp and wholesome, and not nippingly cold. Every one seemed to experience an exhilaration of spirits from the auspicious aspect of the heavens, as well as from the circumstances of the occasion. Never had I seen the excellent-hearted Squire more jovial, nor his handsome wife with a brighter animation of good-humour on her countenance. Even Mr. Appleton and Mrs. Summerly declared they felt themselves quite young again; and the Squire whispered to some of us apart, "that it was almost a pity the worthy couple did not knock up a match between themselves;"—a jest for which he received a laughing rebuke from Mrs. Kingston, who said, "My dear Tom, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Never did Jane appear more lovely than on that morning when arrayed in her bridal dress, and in all the blushing modesty of the occasion. The same too might be said of Isabella Craven, when the carriage which I sent to fetch her mother and herself, brought them both at an early hour to the Hall. Merrily pealed forth the bells of the old church at Sturry, as the equipages drew near; and I believed that the whole population of the little village was assembled to gaze upon that train of carriages and the company whom they contained. The nuptials were solemnized: Isabella Craven became William's wife—my sister Jane was saluted as Lady Egerton. We came forth from the church, the bells again ringing merrily; and we entered the carriages amidst the cheers of the assembled villagers. The train of equipages returned to the Hall, where the wedding breakfast was spread in the principal saloon. But the moment of separation came; and it appeared to me as if my heart were divided into two distinct compartments—one full of happiness, the other full of sorrow,—happiness on account of these auspicious brideals—sorrow at the idea that in forming new ties they seemed to sever old ones, and sent brothers, and sisters, and friends to pursue different pathways in the world. A handsome carriage which I had bought as a present for William and his bride, and drawn by four post-horses, dashed up to the entrance of the Hall: it was immediately followed by the Earl of Chilstone's handsome travelling barouche. Long and fervent were the embraces which took place on the part of myself, William, and Jane: I embraced Isabella also;—and sincere friendship characterized my farewell clasp of the hand with Lord Egerton, who was now my brother-in-law. The adieus were all said: Lord Egerton handed Jane into the barouche—William assisted his own bride into the carriage; and the two equipages rolled away, both having the same destination—that of the metropolis.

The Earl and Countess of Chilstone and all the rest of the party, including Mrs. Craven, remained at the Hall to be present at my marriage with Lord Wilberton. Two young ladies—the daughters of a Baronet residing in Canterbury—were to be my bridesmaids. The morning fixed for the nuptials dawned: it was another bright day, the sun shining with even an unwonted degree of splendour for that winter season, and the heavens presenting one vast expanse of unclouded blue. Again did the bells of Sturry Church ring forth cheerily; and again, as the equipages drew near, were the inha-



bitants assembled. I shall not pause to depict my own feelings—unless it be merely to observe that while proceeding from the Hall to the church, I could not help casting a rapidly retrospective look over my past life, and marvelling with a sense of melting gratitude and solemn awe, at the change which had taken place in my position. I was now twenty-five years of age: a little more than nine years had elapsed since that dull, misty, cheerless October day on which I went to ask for a menial's bread at Twisden Lodge. My soul softened with ineffable emotions as I thus reflected: for if anybody had *then* prophesied that it was written in the book of heaven I should become a peer's bride, such a prognostic would have seemed a cruel and heartless mockery of my humble—nay, even abject position at the time. Yet that record had been made in the volume of Fate—it had been registered in the Chancery of the Eternal—and on the morning of the 17th of December, 1835,

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the bells rang merrily when I entered the church as Miss Price Clavering, and more merrily still when I was conducted forth again as Lady Wilberton.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

I MIGHT have laid down my pen at the conclusion of the preceding chapter,—only that I thought the reader would feel interested in some of those characters who had figured upon the stage of my narrative, and concerning whom I am enabled to record a few additional particulars. For the time when I began to write these memoirs with a view to their publication, was in the year 1850—and consequently fifteen years after my marriage with Lord Wilberton. During that interval I have

necessarily encountered many of those persons whom I had previously known under a variety of circumstances,—some of them being purposely sought out by me—others falling in my way by accident: so that few could be named relative to whom I have not something to say.

First of all I must state that immediately after our bridal we repaired to London, where we took up our abode at Wilberton House in Piccadilly. In a very short time hosts of visitors, comprising what may be termed the entire fashionable world, left their cards; and innumerable invitations to balls, parties, and soirées poured in. We however chose to limit the circle of our acquaintances to such families whose society was really to be coveted on the score of amiability of character and intellectuality, in contra-distinction with the mere frivolous pleasure-seekers and gilded butterflies of the higher order. After a few weeks we repaired to the country-seat in Yorkshire, where all the tenantry were assembled to receive us; and we experienced the most enthusiastic welcome. There we remained for two months, my noble-hearted husband personally visiting every house and cottage upon the immense estate, and studying his best to ameliorate the condition of all who resided upon the domain. In these proceedings I cheerfully took an active part; and I may say without vanity that the good we were enabled to effect, extended beyond the limit of our own estates,—for either through shame or else through ready goodwill, the proprietors and landlords of adjacent territories more or less imitated our example. While in Yorkshire, I received a letter from Lady Oldcastle, the late Lord Harlesdon's sister,—who, as the reader will remember, had taken charge of the orphan children. Her ladyship was staying with those children, at that time, at Harlesdon Park in Derbyshire; and her letter to me was couched in not merely the politest, but even the kindest terms. She begged that she might have the pleasure of renewing an acquaintance which she had formed at Harlesdon House in London some few years ago; and she gave Eustace and myself a pressing invitation to pass a few days at the Park on our way back to London, whenever we might be returning to the metropolis. I could not help smiling as I read this letter: for I well remembered that all the acquaintance Lady Oldcastle had ever formed with me, was to inquire of *Jemima* at the time “who the young person was that the children made such a fuss about?”—but now the “young person” was not merely considered worthy Lady Oldcastle's friendship, but likewise received a pressing invitation to visit her at Harlesdon Park. After some little deliberation, Eustace and I agreed that we would accept it: for to confess the truth, I longed once more to behold a spot which for many reasons was so memorable with me, and where I had first received the avowal of the love of him who was now my husband. Besides, I wished to visit the Percivals, with whom I had frequently corresponded, but whom I had never seen since I quitted the establishment of Miss Nibkins.

It was in the Spring when we left our country-seat in Yorkshire, and repaired to Harlesdon Park. There we experienced a really hospitable reception from Lady Oldcastle, who could be as amiable towards her equals as she was disagreeable to her in-

feriors. The children were delighted to see me; and I was not merely pleased, but also much affected on beholding them. Eustace and I visited the Percivals, and passed a day with them. Leonard was now a substantial farmer, and had every reason to be as happy as he was prosperous. His wife Ellen, from being of a slight symmetrical figure, had expanded into the full bloom of womanhood, and looked remarkably handsome. They had four beautiful children, of whom worthy Mrs. Baker, who was still alive and hearty, appeared as fond as were the parents themselves. I need hardly say how welcome Eustace and I were at that abode of unalloyed happiness: and we took our departure in the evening with hearts full of a serene and sacred joy at the picture of felicity we had thus witnessed.

On the following day Eustace and I visited that shady lane where he had first avowed his love, and where I had confessed mine in return. We sat down on the very spot where he had so suddenly appeared when Sir Aubrey Clavering was pressing his own suit; and as we gazed in silence upon each other—but with our looks full of ineffable feelings—we read what was passing in each other's minds: we mutually knew that we were looking back to that date, and marvelling at the varied and manifold incidents which had since occurred. Two days afterwards, when we took our leave of Lady Oldcastle and quitted Harlesdon Park, we stopped at Derby, where I made inquiries concerning Miss Nibkins. I learnt that she still kept Montpellier House, and that her school, which had fallen off somewhat at the time of her unfortunate marriage with Mr. Tomlinson, had flourished again—so that she was once more prospering. Had it been otherwise, I should certainly have called to proffer my assistance in as delicate a way as possible: but as it was, I did not choose to present myself to her, lest she might think it was through a vain desire to dazzle her with my now brilliant position.

On our way back to London, we had to pass through that village where Mr. Palmer and Mrs. Hilton dwelt. Ah! what emotions swelled in my heart as the travelling-carriage, drawn by four post-horses, neared that hamlet where but a few years back I had first set foot as a friendless, houseless, starving wanderer, and where with an almost broken heart I had experienced such cruel repulses and rebuffs. As Mrs. Hilton had since written civilly to me—indeed affectionately—and as I felt that her conduct was hospitable and generous to me at the time, and that it was only natural she should have acted as she did under the influence of Dr. Vincent's representations,—I determined to stop and call upon her. Eustace gladly assented; and the handsome travelling-carriage dashed up to the front of the neat little cottage standing in the midst of its shrubbery of evergreens. A buxom servant-woman hastened down to the gate; and I had no difficulty in recognising that very same Lucy who had so good-naturedly bustled about to get me breakfast when I was conducted in a half-famished condition thither. She thought she knew me likewise; and when I gave her to understand that I was indeed the same person, she stood for a few moments petrified with amazement. At length she inquired whom she should announce?—and when she was told “Lord and Lady Wilberton,” she again appeared utterly astounded and bewil-

dered. It doubtless seemed to her like an incident in a fairy-tale. Mrs. Hilton came forth from the cottage: for Mr. Palmer, who happened to be with her at the time, saw me from the window and recognised me. The old lady embraced me, sobbing and smiling as she proffered congratulations, and asked my forgiveness for her own conduct, all in the same breath. I soon gave her to understand that I only remembered her kindness, and had therefore come personally—being in the neighbourhood—to thank her for it. Once more did I sit in that little parlour where everything bespoke neatness, cleanliness, and comfort; and tears rose into my eyes as I reflected what I was now, in contrast with my position when for the first time I sat in that same place. In the course of conversation I learnt from Mr. Palmer that Lord Miltown, Dr. Vincent's intimate friend, had recently broken his neck while out fox-hunting; and thus terminated the career of a nobleman who was wont to boast that for the latter half of his life he had never experienced a day's illness and had never gone to bed sober. He was seventy-three when he died, and thus had hunted up to the very last. After passing an hour at Mrs. Hilton's cottage, Eustace and I took our leave, and re-entering the carriage, continued our way. As the equipage rolled through the village, I beheld that small chandlery-shop where I had asked for—no, *begged* a piece of bread, and where I had met so cruel a repulse. I pointed out the place to my husband; and he said, in a voice full of tenderness and love, "If I grieve, dearest Mary, as I think of the sorrows you have at any time endured in past years, I at least experience the satisfaction of knowing how impossible it is that afflictions of the same kind can ever recur!"

We continued our route to London: but we did not make a long stay in the metropolis on this occasion: for we had promised to pass the summer months at Kingston Grange. Thither accordingly we proceeded,—halting for a couple of days at Clavering Hall on our way. It was about three in the afternoon when we came in sight of the Grange; and in the road leading thither, whom should I at once recognise but Luke, mounted on that favourite roan of whose cleverness he used to tell such remarkable anecdotes? He was evidently watching for us; and the instant he beheld the carriage, he turned round and galloped away to carry the intelligence to the Grange. The equipage turned into the park; and as it drove up the gravel road towards the entrance of the mansion, a flag was run up to a tall staff erected on the lawn—volleys of musketry were discharged—while Eustace and I now perceived all the numerous dependants of the Grange drawn up in front of the house to receive us. Enthusiastic cheers burst forth; and we beheld the Squire standing on the steps, waving his hat and hallooing with as hearty a vociferation as any of the rest. Amidst these testimonials of welcome we alighted; and I was received in the arms of Mrs. Kingston, who embraced me affectionately.

"My dear Lady Wilberton, they *would* do it of their own accord," said the Squire, as he shook me by the hand; and he glanced round upon his assembled domestics, male and female. "It was all their own work, I can assure you. We are going to have such rejoicings to welcome you here: an

ox is being roasted whole—and a barrel of ale is to be presently tapped. All my tenants are invited to the festival; and there shall be a dance upon the lawn this evening." Then drawing me mysteriously aside, he said, "My dear Mary—for hang me if I can bring myself to call you by the formal name of Lady Wilberton—do you recognise anybody? Look at that fellow who commands the squad of footmen and grooms with the musketry."

I glanced in the direction indicated; and there, to my astonishment I beheld the well-known countenance of John, who was turned away at the time I was at the Grange, for having embezzled the Squire's money.

"The rogue is back again in my service, you see," continued Mr. Kingston. "It appears that the little affair which caused his dismissal, proved a warning to him; and he retrieved his character. When we have more time, I will tell you how it was he came back. He has been six months with us now, and is the best servant I ever had."

"And no more ingenuity in story-telling, I hope?" said I, laughing deprecatingly.

"No, my dear Mary," quickly responded Mrs. Kingston, who overheard what was passing between me and her husband. "You were the means of inducing us to put an end to that. Tom would rather endure a daily visit from the old Admiral—who, by the bye, is as great a dinner-hunter as ever—than have a false excuse made to get rid of him."

I have not space to enter into farther details respecting our visit to the Grange. Suffice it to say that it was a most happy sojourn; and during the years which have since elapsed, has been frequently repeated. But I must mention that on this occasion Eustace and I one day paid a visit to Dover, to inquire into the condition of the Messiters. We found that Mr. Messiter, after having for some time pursued his new career as a preacher, and as an upholder of the doctrine of entire abstinence from intoxicating liquors, was charged by his flock with being on too intimate terms with one of his female converts;—a committee was appointed to investigate the circumstances, and Mr. Simon Stubler, the secretary, drew up a report most unfavourable to the accused. When called upon for his defence, Mr. Messiter scornfully refused "to have anything more to do with such *low people*," as he now pronounced his flock to consist of; and declaring himself to be the victim of a bitter persecution, he put the key of the chapel in his pocket, as well as the funds of the Snargate Street General and European Total Abstinence Association, which he had founded, and of which he was the treasurer. Inveighing against the ingratitude of the world universally, and his Snargate Street votaries particularly, he took to drinking again,—alleging it to be "for his stomach's sake;" but his stomach was so insatiable that he was literally hurried in a flood of gin to the grave. His death had happened a few weeks previous to the visit which Eustace and I paid to Dover to inquire after the family, whom we found to be in great distress. We gave Mrs. Messiter the means of setting up in business; and her old house in Snargate Street being to let at the time, she was once more installed therein. The lessons of ad-

versity which she had so bitterly experienced, had taught her the necessity of prudence and good management in her domestic concerns; and the result may be thus summed up:—that if any of my readers should happen to pass along Snargate Street at Dover, they will behold the name of “MESITER” over the door of the handsomest and most flourishing grocery establishment in that town.

It was about two years after my marriage, that I one day happened to read in the newspaper an account of two women who were tried at the Old Bailey in London, for the heinous crime of enticing young children into dark alleys and courts, stripping them of their clothes, and then cruelly abandoning them. The names of these two women struck me as I was glancing my eyes over the journal: they were Mrs. Ferguson and Anne Sawbridge. The latter I need not recall to the reader's memory: but perhaps it may be necessary to mention that the former was the woman who kept me in custody at the White Cottage in Derbyshire, and who was also the mother of that John Morley, Sir Aubrey Clavering's groom, who was hanged for the murder of the gamekeeper Harper. Previous convictions for other offences were proved against the two women; and they were sentenced to a period of transportation.

In the family of the Bulls a sad catastrophe took place at about the same time as the incident which I have just related. It must be prefaced by observing that Alderman Bull was duly elected by the Court to which he belonged to serve the office of Lord Mayor of the City of London; and in order to celebrate this event, he gave a grand banquet at his house in Broad Street. It appeared that his younger daughter Lydia—the widow of my deceased brother Robert—had taken unto herself another husband in the person of Mr. Mumpley, Deputy of Portsoken Ward, and a very great man in the City: but her sister Elizabeth, having a husband still living in the shape of Mr. Tomlinson, continued to reside with her father. Of the condition of the Bull family I had remained in ignorance until I read in the newspapers the catastrophe above alluded to. It may be briefly described, amounting only to this—that the turtle soup and the venison given at the banquet were so excellent, that Alderman Bull paid his respects to those dainties more frequently than was consistent with prudence. He was seized with apoplexy as the result of a surfeit, and expired during the night following the festival. I subsequently learnt that he left his property in trust to his children by his second marriage, with only a small annuity of sixty pounds to his elder daughter Elizabeth; and as she had quarrelled with her sister Lydia beyond the possibility of reconciliation, she retired to some cheap and secluded country village, where she was still dwelling when I last heard of her. Having been invited on three or four occasions to entertainments at the Mansion House and Guildhall, I have met Lydia—or rather, Mrs. Mumpley—from whose lips I gleaned these particulars.

Mark Shelburne married Edwina at the expiration of the period of that young lady's term of mourning for her father; and the alliance has proved a most happy one. They have a numerous family: Mark has risen high in his profession;

and the name of Dr. Shelburne is well known at the West End of London. The sincerest friendship has ever continued to subsist between himself and my brother William; and it is scarcely necessary to add that Dr. Shelburne has never again had recourse to the use of that drug the bare mention of which brings shudderingly back to his mind the fearful tragedy with which it was to a certain degree connected. The uncle, having—as before said—completely recovered from the effects of the dreadful wound inflicted upon him, lived for several years to witness the felicity and increasing prosperity of his nephew; and the pillow of his death-bed was smoothed by the devoted attentions of Mark, as well as by the affectionate ministrations of Edwina.

It must not be supposed that though I have recently mentioned Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland and the Antrobuses on such few occasions, my correspondence had ceased with them. On the contrary, Selina and I frequently communicated with each other; and amongst the very first letters of congratulation which I received on my marriage, were the kindest epistles from those good friends at Winchester. Mr. Antrobus died a few years ago; and his wife did not long survive him. Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland shortly afterwards removed to London; and we constantly visit each other.

I must now speak of my father. After that visit which we paid to Kingston Grange, as ere now described, Eustace and I crossed over to the Continent, and proceeded to Mount Cassel. My father was rejoiced to see us; and we on our side were well pleased to find that he was in good health and so much elated by our presence. We remained two months at Cassel; and every successive year did we repair thither to pass a similar period,—until 1843, when a severe illness seized my parent somewhat suddenly; and the result proved fatal. His death-bed was however attended by those whom he loved and in whom he felt interested: for Eustace and I, Lord Egerton and Jane, William and Isabella, were all gathered there. He knew that we were prosperous in a worldly point of view—that we were all enjoying riches—and that our domestic bliss was without the admixture of a single depreciatory ingredient. He saw that the three marriages thus formed by his children, had ensured their most perfect felicity; and he therefore had no cares to trouble the last moments of his existence. He felt that for all the past he had made his peace with heaven. It was with resignation and serene contentment that he beheld death approaching; and he expired in my arms. His remains were buried in a beautiful little cemetery which is in the close vicinage of Mount Cassel; and a marble monument, surmounted by an urn—surrounded, too, by young trees that were planted there—marks the spot where his ashes lie interred. It was by his own wish, expressed in his last moments, that he was sepulchred in that cemetery.

For some years after the last occasion on which I beheld Edgar Selden in Margaret Street, I heard nothing of him,—until one day, Eustace and myself being on a visit to Brighton, I was struck by the appearance of a wretched-looking invalid who was being wheeled along in a Merlin chair. His countenance was not merely pale—it was cadaverous: his eyes seemed glazing beneath the

touch of Death—he was shockingly emaciated—he lay back as if without the power to move a limb, and even without the energy to observe the gay scene amidst which he was thus being dragged along. Eustace and I were on foot at the time; and, fearfully though Edgar Selden was altered, I immediately recognised him. He recognised me too; and then he started, like a corpse that is galvanized. He threw upon me one look—Oh! a look full of remorse, anguish, and horror,—a look that with all the eloquence of a soul suddenly awakened up from languor and looking through the glazing dimness of the eyes, which it even animated for a moment, proclaimed how poignantly he felt all the wrongs of which he had been guilty towards my perished sister. Not a word passed between us; and I quickly averted my countenance from that of the invalid. A few days afterwards the local newspapers contained an account of the death of Mr. Edgar Selden, who, it appeared, had for some time been residing at Brighton in the vain hope of recovering that health which dissipation and debauchery had destroyed.

While speaking of Brighton, I am reminded of a little incident which must not be omitted. It relates to Miranda Twisden, who, if she did not exactly finish her education under the tutelage of the fashionable Miss Tubley, at least cut it short of her own accord, by eloping from that lady's seminary, when just past her sixteenth year, with one of the riding-masters—thus imitating the example of a former pupil in the same establishment, and concerning whose exploit she had written to her mother in the very letter that Mrs. Twisden so generously gave to me as “a token of her esteem.” This circumstance seemed all in a moment to arouse in the soul of Mr. Twisden a spirit which though long latent, nevertheless was not extinct, and of late years had occasionally manifested itself—especially in money-matters. He declared that his daughter had made this silly match entirely because her mother had placed her at a school where her head was turned with nonsense instead of being crammed with knowledge, and where dashing officers and handsome riding-masters were more thought of than books and slates. Vowing that thenceforth he would be the master, and no longer allow his wife to have her own way, the old gentleman displayed an amount of courage which must have astonished himself. It certainly astonished Mrs. Twisden: but he was resolute and determined. She tried what hysterics would do—but he was unmoved; she threatened to leave the house—and he told her that in *this* respect she was assuredly her own mistress. To be brief, she succumbed; but her defeat preyed so upon her mind that she fretted herself into an illness which took a serious turn and soon proved fatal. Mr. Twisden survived her some years,—living to the ripe old age of ninety-one, and retaining his bodily health until within a few weeks of his death, and his intellectual faculties until the last. The reader may rest assured that he did not risk another venture in the way of matrimony.

I must now group hastily together the names of a few persons of whom I have heard certain particulars at different times, and by a variety of ways. Mr. Octavius Lapwing, with whom my

unfortunate sister Sarah was connected, suffered imprisonment for the offence with which he was charged on the occasion when I witnessed his arrest: after his release he returned to his old habits, which at length placed him in the dock at the Old Bailey on the more serious accusation of forgery; and he was condemned to transportation. Captain Tollemache perished, as a galley-slave, at Rochefort, by the upsetting of a barge into which, while working in chains, he was lowering down stores from the arsenal-wharf. The Hon. Captain Lavender recently figured for the fifth time in the Insolvent Debtors' Court; and his case was so dreadfully bad—so saturated with frauds, swindlings, and rascalities—that his petition was dismissed, and he was sent back to the Queen's Bench Prison, where in all probability he is vegetating at the present moment. His friend Mr. Bergamot was recently recognised by my brother-in-law Lord Egerton as the driver of one of Hansom's Patent Cabriolets. Mr. Ward drank himself to death; and his widow was shortly afterwards put into possession, not only of her own fortune, but likewise of that of her uncle Mr. Scrawby, who died suddenly through excessive joy at having gained for a client a Chancery suit which had lasted thirty-three years, and which, having swallowed up the bulk of the property litigated for, yielded only just enough in the long run to pay the lawyers' costs. Mrs. Ward married again,—her second husband being a very respectable man; and the happiness she experiences in this latter alliance compensates her for the misery attending the first. Charles Hunter and his wife Jimima have prospered well: he is now the manager of a large and influential Joint Stock Company, his income amounting at least to eight hundred a year. Mr. Wenlock, the solicitor who so nearly robbed me out of the fortune left by my deceased friend Laura Maitland, experienced a rapid series of misfortunes—beheld all his property swept away—was reduced to penury—and perished in the blood of a desperate suicide. Tom Scudder, the sailor at Deal, remained single so long as his mother was alive: but at length he married—and when last I saw him, which was during a visit to my friends at the Grange, he was the proprietor of two fine pilot boats and the father of three bouncing boys.

Before laying down my pen, I will yet record a few particulars, so as to satisfy every point of curiosity or interest that there may be in the reader's mind. In the first place, therefore, I may observe that my brother William has justified all the most sanguine hopes entertained concerning him—that he has risen to the highest celebrity in his profession—and that for services rendered in his capacity of physician to a member of the Royal Family, the distinction of a Baronetcy has been conferred upon him. Sir William and Lady Price have four children; and a similar number has blessed the marriage of Lord Egerton and my sister Jane. The Earl and Countess of Chilstone are still alive, and in the enjoyment of excellent health: while their old age is cheered by witnessing the happiness of those who are nearest and dearest to them.

Having specified the issue of my brother's and sister's marriages, I know that the reader will not be satisfied unless I prove equally communicative in respect to myself. I have two children—both

boys. The elder is named Eustace, after his father: the younger Aubrey, through respect for him who in the last days of his life behaved with such noble generosity to me, and made such ample atonement for his former misdeeds.

What more have I to relate? Is it necessary for me to add that I experience an amount of happiness which seldom falls to the lot of a human being? I possess a magnanimous-hearted and chivalrous-souled husband, whose love has known no diminution, and with whom no angry look nor word has ever been exchanged: I

possess rank and wealth—and therewith, thank heaven, the power and the means to do good: those whom I love and in whom I feel interested, are equally the objects of Fortune's kindest smiles: I have many tried, sincere, and valued friends;—what, then, is wanting to complete my happiness? Nothing: and in laying down my pen, I can conscientiously assure my readers that the bliss which I enjoy is far more than sufficient to compensate for the many trials, vicissitudes, and afflictions which have occupied so large a portion of these

MEMOIRS OF A SERVANT-MAID.

THE END.

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